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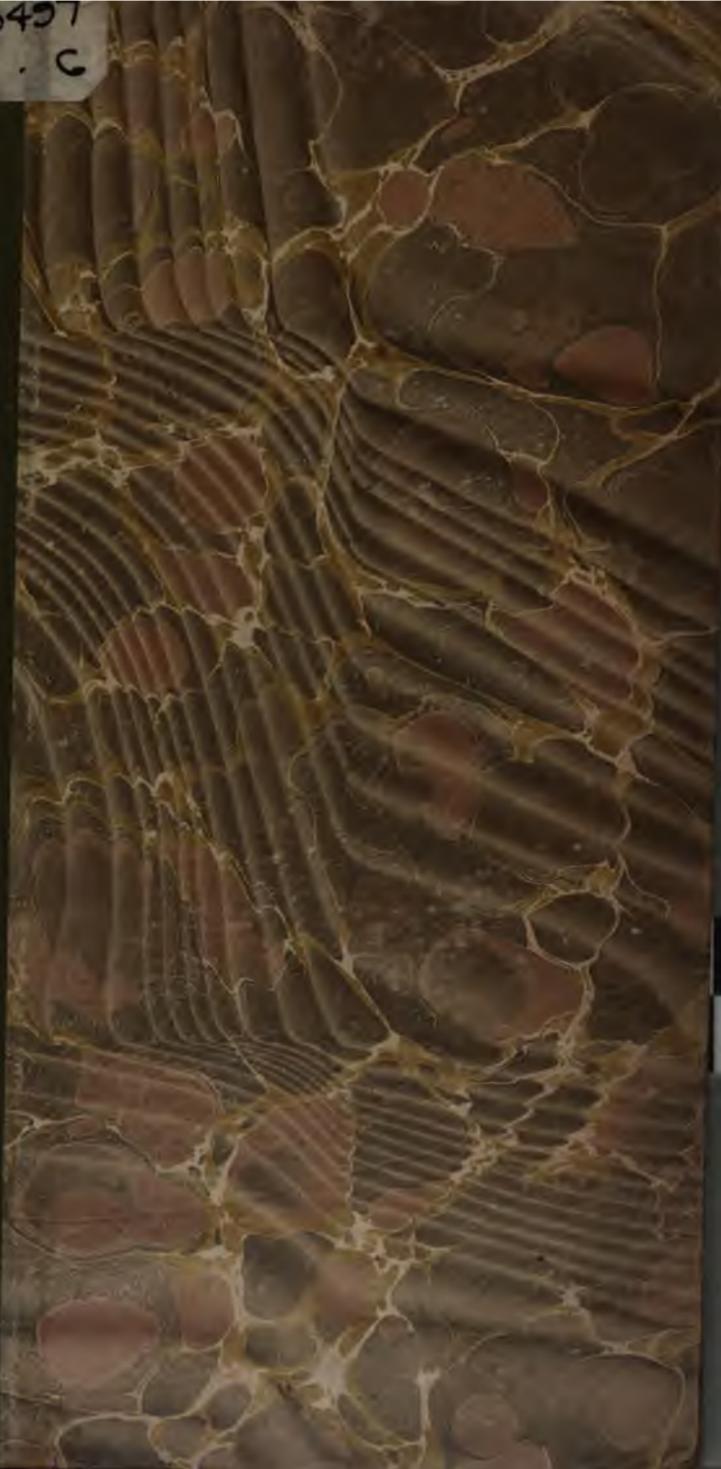
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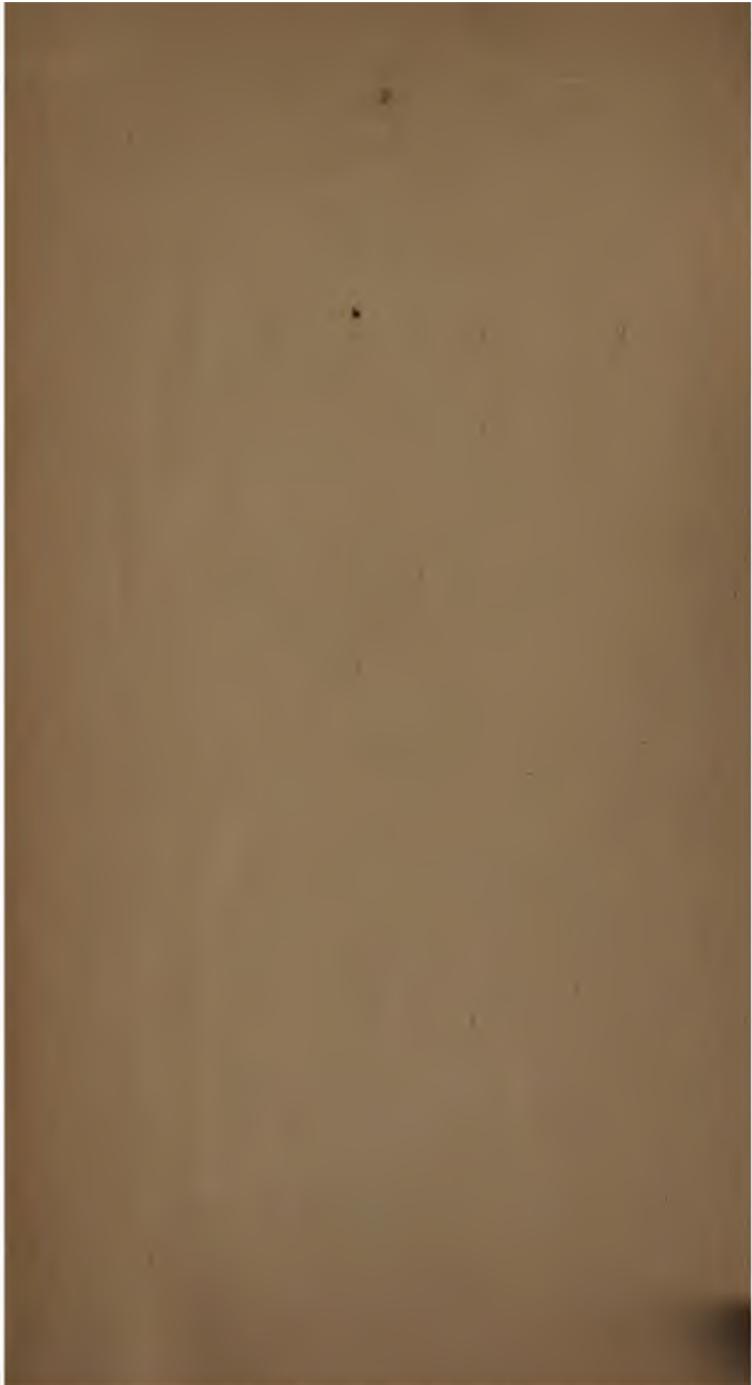


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No. 52.

THE IDLER

A Play in four Acts

BY

C. HADDON CHAMBERS.

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THE IDLER

A Play in Four Acts

BY

C. HADDON CHAMBERS

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THE IDLER.

Produced at the St. James' Theatre, London, 26th Feb.,
1891.

CAST:—

MR. MARK CROSS, Man of leisure, single, about 30..	Mr. George Alexander
SIR JOHN HARDING, M. P., Independent means, married, about 30.....	Mr. Herbert Waring
MR. SIMEON STRONG, Wealthy American, single, about 30.....	Mr. John Mason
GENERAL MERRYWEATHER, about 60...Mr. Nutcombe Gould	
BENNETT, Mark Cross's Man-servant.....	
LADY HARDING, Wife of Sir John, beautiful woman, about 25. Merryweather's daughter by his first wife.....	Miss Marion Terry
MRS. CROSS, Widow, Mark's mother, about 50.....	Lady Monckton
KATE MERRYWEATHER, About 18. Merryweather's daughter by his second wife....	Miss Maude Millett
MRS. GLYNN-STANMORE, Fashionable widow, looking out for a husband. About 35.....	Miss Gertrude Kingston

PERIOD:—The Present.

THE IDLER.

ACT I.

TIME OF REPRESENTATION: Twenty-nine minutes.

HAND PROPERTIES: MS. for Harding. Work basket and work on L. c. table. Real flower up L. Table and tea things off R.

FURNITURE REQUIRED: Wicker-work and rustic table L. c. Chair either side of it. Chair R. c. Chair R. Table R. Garden seat up L. Chair up C.

ACT II.

TIME OF REPRESENTATION: Thirty-two minutes.

HAND PROPERTIES: Bouquet for LADY H.

FURNITURE REQUIRED: Sofa L. c. Chair R. c. Grand Piano and Stool up R.

ACT III.

TIME OF REPRESENTATION: Twenty-eight minutes.

HAND PROPERTIES: Letters and salver for BENNETT. Fan for LADY H. Bell (for clock-strike) and Knocker. Writing things on R. table. Cigarettes and matches on L. c. table. Soda siphon, glasses, whiskey, lemon, knife and plate on sideboard L.

FURNITURE REQUIRED: Writing table and chair R. c. Chair R. Settee L. Chair L. of it. Small table R. of it. Sideboard L. Curtains to C. window. Clock on mantel. Lamp on pedestal by L. door.

ACT IV.

TIME OF REPRESENTATION: Twenty-two minutes.

HAND PROPERTIES: Two revolvers in case for SIR JOHN. Pocket-book for MARK. Bell (for clock-strike).

FURNITURE: Same as Act III.

THE IDLER.

ACT I.

(MUSIC for rise)

SCENE:—Veranda attached to LADY HARDING's drawing-room, Kensington Palace Gardens, London. French window of the drawing-room open on to stage R. Arches of veranda c. and L showing gardens beyond and in the distance Kensington Gardens.

(KATE MERRYWEATHER discovered seated up stage c.)

(Enter GENERAL MERRYWEATHER R.)

GEN. (Calling) Kate! Kate! Where are you?

KATE. (Jumping up) Here I am, Papa. Where are you going to take me this afternoon?

GEN. I don't propose taking you anywhere.

KATE. But I've nothing to do.

GEN. Then make me a bouquet for my coat.

KATE. (c. going up and getting scissors and cutting flowers from pots L. and arranging them) What's the good of being in London if you don't go out!

GEN. (Crossing L. and sitting) Pleasure may sometimes be found at home. One would think from the longing you always have to be out somewhere, that you were packed away on the fifth floor of a hotel, instead of enjoying your sister's delightful hospitality. I must really persuade Helen to invite us for another week.

KATE. (Up c. at flower stand) Please, don't, Papa—unless you mean to take me out more.

GEN. Why?

KATE. (Making bouquet c.) Well, Helen hasn't been married very long, and—

GEN. Well?

KATE. You do get a little tired of newly married people after a time, don't you?

GEN. What do you mean?

KATE. (Coming down c.) I mean that when you

THE IDLER.

haven't a sweetheart of your own it's rather a bore to—you know—to see people very fond of each other.

GEN. I haven't noticed it.

KATE. Perhaps you've never been without a sweetheart?

GEN. Kate! (*Rising*) Your remark is scarcely respectful! (*Cross R.*)

KATE. I couldn't help it—because you know, you've been married twice—and now—

GEN. Well—and now—

KATE. (*Coming to him—they meet R. of c.*) Now I'll fix this in your buttonhole. (*Bus. of pinning flower in coat*) Papa, do you know what Mrs. Glynn-Stanmore says about you?

GEN. No!

KATE. She says that when an elderly man takes to wearing flowers in his buttonhole it's a bad sign.

GEN. Mrs. Glynn-Stanmore is exceedingly impertinent—as most women are who marry above their station in life. Elderly man indeed! I shall not allow you to meet her again! She will teach you to flirt and all sorts of dreadful things. Like all widows she's too—too—

KATE. Too what, Papa?

GEN. (c.) Too learned—You know I was always fond of flowers.

KATE. (c.) But not in your buttonhole. I think Mrs. Glynn-Stanmore meant to insinuate that you were in love. (*Embracing him*) I hope not. Please say you're not in love, Papa.

GEN. (*Crossing L.*) Kate, you are getting perfectly ridiculous.

KATE. But you haven't denied it.

GEN. (*Sitting L. c.*) I don't think it is quite decent to interrogate your father on such delicate subjects.

KATE. But I notice things, you know.

GEN. Young people generally notice more than they should.

KATE. I've noticed that you've made up your mind to stay in this afternoon, and that Helen mentioned at luncheon that Mrs. Cross would call.

GEN. What of that?

KATE. Young people not only notice but draw conclusions.

GEN. Well? Well?

KATE. (*Back of chair L. c.*) I've drawn the conclusion that you're staying in for the sake of Mrs. Cross. (*Pause*)

GEN. Kate, Kate, what a worry you are! (*Rising and going up stage, then down R. C., sitting R. C.*) I think I must send you back to school.

KATE. But I don't want to learn any more.

GEN. I think you've a good deal to unlearn.

KATE. You mean I was right about Mrs. Cross? (*Crossing to him R. C.*)

GEN. Certainly not. Mrs. Cross is a woman for whom I entertain the highest respect.

KATE. Does that prevent you from loving her, Papa? (*Pause*)

GEN. (*Aside, groans.*)

KATE. I suppose you respected my Mamma, and Helen's Mamma, and loved them as well—otherwise you wouldn't have married them. (*Pause*)

GEN. Perhaps after all, my dear, it would be better for you to go out.

KATE. By myself.

GEN. (*Trying to read*) Yes—you might drive in the Park for an hour or two.

KATE. No thanks, Papa—I'd rather stay with you. It's better fun. (*Sitting on arm of chair*)

GEN. (*Rising—bus.*) Not for me. Do you know, my dear, you have a—what shall I say? an unexpectedness of thought which makes you a very disturbing companion for one of my years and temperament? (*Sitting again*)

KATE. You may be sure, Papa, that I wouldn't waste so much of my unexpectedness on you if I had any other companion. (*Bus.*)

GEN. I suppose not—It's rather hard on me though—I wish you had a little more of your sister's dignity and repose.

KATE. Helen again—always Helen! (*Crossing L. C.*)

GEN. Why not—she is a splendid model for you.

KATE. I think, Papa, I'd feel that more if you were less anxious to impress it upon me.

GEN. I am only anxious to improve you. Now, Helen—

KATE. (L.) Is perfect, of course. (*Seated.*)

(Enter LADY HARDING from R. 2. W.)

GEN. No—no one is perfect—and perhaps a perfect woman would not be a loveable woman.

LADY H. (*Putting her hands over MERRYWEATHER'S shoulders from behind*) Or a perfect man a loveable man,

GEN. (*Looking up back at her*) Then you don't even think your husband perfect?

LADY H. He's only perfectly loveable. (*Turns L. C. and sits*)

GEN. Hem! Your mother used to say that of me.

KATE. I hope *my* mother had more sense.

GEN. Your mother, my dear, was a woman of taste.

KATE. And Mrs Cross? (*Going round back of table*)

GEN. Kate!

KATE. (*To LADY H.*) Helen, you mentioned that Mrs. Cross would call this afternoon. That's why Papa won't take me out. Perhaps Mark may come with her.

LADY H. Mark!

KATE. Yes. (*Leaning on chair*)

LADY H. (*Resuming work*) Mr. Cross is not in London.

KATE. Isn't he though! Papa and I saw him in Piccadilly before luncheon.

(MERRYWEATHER sits in chair R. near R. 2. w.)

LADY H. (*Aside*) Mark returned!

KATE. Yes—Aren't you glad?

LADY H. Certainly. Why should I not be?

KATE. I only thought you might feel a little awkward in meeting him. Everybody thought at one time that you would marry him. I was *sure* of it!

LADY H. Your judgment isn't always correct, you see.

KATE. No. I lack experience. But you know, Helen, that you and Mr. Cross flirted dreadfully before he went away, then when John came along, I—

(Enter SIR JOHN HARDING R. 2. w.)

SIR J. Well, what took place when I came along? (c.)

KATE. (L. c.) I became silent.

SIR J. Please don't do so now.

KATE. (L. c. down) We were only talking of Mrs. Cross's son.

SIR J. Has Mrs. Cross a son? I had really forgotten.

LADY H. (*At work-table up L. c.*) I have surely mentioned him to you?

SIR J. I don't remember it. What's his name?

LADY H. Mark.

SIR J. Mark!—Mark Cross—the name is familiar!

KATE. (L. c.) Of course. Last season he and Helen—

(GENERAL coughs and signs violently to Kate)

SIR J. Yes?

KATE. What was I going to say?

SIR J. Something about Mr. Cross and Helen.

KATE. Oh yes, I remember—they tried to sing a duet at a party of Mrs. Cross's—and they made such a failure of it. (*Moving over to R.*)

SIR J. That's not quite what you were going to say, Kate. (*To LADY H.*) Of course—Mr. Cross was an old flame of yours. I remember Mrs. Stanmore telling me about him. But I heard the name before Mrs. Stanmore mentioned it.

KATE. (*Who has crossed over, meeting MERRY-WEATHER R. C., to MERRY.*) Have I put my foot in it?

GEN. Very likely—your accomplishments lie in that direction.

KATE. Perhaps we had better go into the garden.

GEN. (*Rises*) It might be as well. Your talents require plenty of space, my dear.

(*Exeunt GENERAL and KATE down steps L. up stage*)

SIR J. (*Crossing to chair R. C.*) Mark Cross! I knew a man of that name once. Was your friend ever in America?

LADY H. Yes, I think so.

SIR J. (*Aside, thoughtfully*) Humph! (*Aloud, seated*) Was Mr. Cross a great friend of yours?

LADY H. Scarcely a great friend—come—(*Rising and coming to R. C.*) I'll tell you. Before I met you, Mr. Cross and I—Oh, don't look like that! It was not serious!

SIR J. Then why did Mrs. Stanmore speak to me of him? I remember that she has mentioned him more than once—has repeated it with an unpleasant persistence. (*Rise*)

LADY H. Only because she's jealous of me. She wanted to marry you herself.

SIR J. (*Folds his arms*) You think so?

LADY H. (*Resting her elbows on his arms and looking into his eyes smiling*) Don't you?

SIR J. (*Laughing*) Perhaps so.

LADY H. Nonsense! You can't be so blindly modest as not to know it!

SIR J. I'm certain I've met this Mark Cross before—in any case I feel sure that I shall dislike him.

LADY H. Why?

SIR J. Because you have smiled upon him.

LADY H. I've smiled upon hundreds of men—but loved only one.

SIR J. (*Moving towards her a little*) That one?

LADY H. Nonsense. You know so well.

SIR J. I delight to hear you repeat it.

LADY H. You—you—you, John! (*Going towards him*)

SIR J. (*Kisses her*) That assurance will keep me confident and happy till we meet again. (*Places her in chair R. C., kisses her and starts up stage—she detains him*)

LADY H. Are you going?

SIR J. Yes—to the study. I must sketch out my speech for to-morrow.

LADY H. Will it take you long?

SIR J. No. There is not much difficulty. I have only to denounce the Government.

LADY H. It is always easy to denounce anything.

SIR J. Very. Besides, I have good lungs and the invaluable power of working myself into a passion!

LADY H. Dreadful! I hope you'll never be in a passion with me!

SIR J. That would be impossible. (*Bending over her*)

LADY H. And you think you'll upset the Government?

SIR J. I think we shall this time.

LADY H. Will it be a good thing for the country?

SIR J. Of course. It will bring our side into power.

LADY H. And will it be a good thing for you? I should be furious if you were neglected.

SIR J. I am sure I shall not be. I shall have an Under-Secretaryship—and I may be in the Cabinet.

LADY H. That I am sure will be a good thing for the country.

SIR J. I knew you would think so.

(*Exit SIR J. HARDING R. 2. w.*)

LADY H. (*In a chair R. C.*) John has a latent capacity for jealousy which is a little startling. Fancy being so annoyed at the mention of my old flirtation with Mark Cross! And yet once I liked Mark—and had he not gone away perhaps—I am glad he went away, for I might have married a man because I liked him, instead of marrying a man because I loved him. No doubt Mark is glad too, and so we are all happy. (*Crossing L. C.*)

(Enter SERVANT R. U. E.—*from conservatory*)

SERV. Mr. Mark Cross.

(Enter MARK CROSS R. U. E.)

LADY H. (Aside) Mark!—Mr. Cross! (Rising a little startled)

MARK. How do you do? (Coming down R. C.)

LADY H. This is a surprise.

MARK. Not an unpleasant one, I hope.

LADY H. How could it be? I'm delighted to see you again. I only heard to-day that you had returned. (Going a little to L.)

MARK. (R. C.) I reached home last night. My mother told me that she would call here this afternoon.

LADY H. (L. C.) I expect her.

MARK. She pointed out to me that it was my duty and privilege to—add my congratulations to the many you received two months ago. I hope mine are not too late to be acceptable.

LADY H. Certainly not. They are most welcome—especially as they come from so old and valued a friend. You have never met my husband?

MARK. No. Nor had you when I last saw you.

LADY H. (Slightly embarrassed) That is quite a long time ago. (Sitting L. C.)

MARK. (Putting hat on table R.) Only six months.

LADY H. That is a long time.

MARK. To a woman I suppose it is.

LADY H. Why to a woman?

MARK. Women forget so quickly.

LADY H. Have I forgotten anything?

MARK. Many things—my Christian name, for instance, which you once used. (Sitting R. C.)

LADY H. Six months ago. Now I am married and you must put up with the conventional Mister.

MARK. And you have forgotten to thank me for the forgiving spirit I show in coming to congratulate you.

LADY H. Ah! now I see what you mean. You intend teasing me about the little flirtation we had before you went away.

MARK. I assure you I couldn't treat so serious a subject lightly.

LADY H. Serious, do you say? What could have been less so? Let me see—if I remember rightly you called me Helen sometimes when we were alone, and just to save you from feeling embarrassed at your own audacity,

I called you Mark. That was the most serious part of it. Of course you meant nothing and I meant nothing.

MARK. You astonish me!

LADY H. How?

MARK. Until you put it like that I had no idea that our flirtation was so trifling—and you really meant nothing?

LADY H. Of course not! All girls learn to flirt a little—it's a part of their education.

MARK. It's a pity.

LADY H. Why a pity?

MARK. Well, all men are not sensible, you know. Some of us are terribly stupid.

LADY H. Indeed!

MARK. Surprising but true, I assure you. Men are often stupid enough to love a woman.

LADY H. Do you call that stupid?

MARK. Yes, don't you?

LADY H. No.

MARK. (*c. rises and comes near her*) No? Well, what do you think of a man who falls in love with a woman and imagines because she—affects to think more of him than the other men she meets—that she loves him in return?

LADY H. I could pity him. (*O MUSIC O*)

MARK. Could you really? Let me tell you the story of such a man. He fell in love with a woman—but he had no right to. You see there was something of the villain in him—for he had a wife living.

LADY H. A wife!

MARK. (*r. of her*) Yes—he had married her in his wild days, and she had left him almost immediately for a new lover—or an old one. Three years after he, as I say, fell in love—here in London. Fell in love! Bah! boys do that. He was a man! He loved with a love that might have made him an angel—or a devil. And the woman he loved affected to return it—or as you would say, she flirted with him. He—not being sensible, you know—believed in her. Then came a letter to him from the wife who was dying in Italy. He went—bearing in his heart, the smile of the woman whom he thought loved him. In a few months he came back a free man—came to lay his heart and life at the feet of this woman—came—and found her married!

LADY H. (*Starts*) Married!

MARK. The truth, I assure you. The man's my only friend. (*MUSIC stops*)

LADY H. (*Rising slowly*) Mark!

MARK. Helen—I should say Lady Harding—I'm sorry—my story was a painful one—much too painful for a happily married woman to hear. But what would you have? It ends better than most true stories—for it leaves at least one of the characters perfectly happy. What does it matter about the other? The sufferings of half the world are necessary to the happiness of the other half.

(*Pause—LADY H. drops work*)

LADY H. The woman in the story did not wrong your friend intentionally.

MARK. Of course not. Women never do wrong—intentionally.

LADY H. You are cynical. The case you put is very common. A man and woman meet and are interested in each other; the man disappears without a word. The woman meets another man whom she loves and who loves her. They are married. Man No. 1 returns: well, he's a man of the world—he forgives what he thinks there is to forgive and forgets her—that is to say—he—(*Offering her hand*) remains her friend.

MARK. (*r. c. takes her hand slowly, pauses, they look at each other, she withdraws her hand*) Helen, I almost forgive you!

LADY H. Only almost?

MARK. Yes, that is all.

LADY H. I am sorry. (*He prepares to go, goes up R. C., takes hat and cane*) You are not going?—I want you to meet my husband.

MARK. (*c. coming down again*) Thank you—but I must forego that pleasure. I am afraid that I am *not* a man of the world—I can forgive—too readily—but—now that I have seen you again and looked into your eyes, I feel I cannot forget—you see—I had better go. (*Slight pause*)

LADY H. Yes, you had better go. Good-bye.

(*MARK is going when enter SIR JOHN with MSS.*)

MARK. Good-bye.

SIR J. (*Not seeing MARK*) Helen, here's the idea for my peroration. I think you'll say it's happy. (*Looks up from MSS. and goes R.*) Oh, I beg your pardon! I didn't know you had a visitor.

LADY H. Mr. Cross—my husband. (*Turning to table L. C.*)

(They look hard at each other)

SIR J. Mark Cross!

MARK. Yes, Gentleman Jack!

SIR J. *(Quickly)* John Harding, you mean.
Aside to him Not a word about the old days before my wife. *(Aloud)* I'm delighted to meet you again.

LADY H. *(L. c.)* You know each other then?

SIR J. Yes, we met in the States. *(R.)*

MARK. Yes, we met in the States. *(Moves up)*

SIR J. You are not going, Cross?

MARK. *(R. c.)* I'm afraid I must!

LADY H. Mr. Cross spoke of an important engagement, but—*(L.)*

SIR J. Put it off, old fellow. I'd particularly like to have a chat with you about old times. *(Coming to MARK and taking hat from him and putting it R.)*

MARK. You see I can't help it.

SIR J. That's splendid! *(Coming down R.)*

LADY H. Were the old times, as you call them, profitable?

MARK. Perhaps not. They were exciting though—desperately so sometimes.

LADY H. *(c., crossing R. c.)* I didn't know you had any desperate adventures, John.

SIR J. *(R.)* I? Not particularly so. That is—

MARK. *(L. c.)* Your husband is too happy now to remember those he had.

LADY H. Well, I'll leave you. I should be in the way. *(Going up stage)*

MARK. On the contrary, I assure you, Lady Harding—

LADY H. *(At R. 2 w.)* No assurance would convince me. My instinct tells me that when men talk about old times they don't want a female audience.

(Exit R. 2. w.)

SIR J. Well, Cross?

MARK. *(Seated R. of L. table)* Well, Harding, it's a far cry from Golden Valley to an ancient Baronetcy and the House of Commons. I ought to congratulate you.

SIR J. *(Coming to him.)* The baronetcy became unexpectedly mine through a tragedy—the death of my cousin in a railway accident—a seat in the House seemed to follow quite naturally. In any case a man must settle down some time or other. One mustn't always remain a waster.

MARK. Ah—I suppose not.

SIR J. (c.) However, I suppose Golden Valley is as good a field for wild oats as any other place—a little better, perhaps, as it's further from home than most places.

MARK. Yes, it's a pity though that the world grows smaller—and distance shorter every day.

SIR J. (*Crossing R.*) That's true. It reminds me, by the way, that I wouldn't like my wife to know the sort of life—(*Closing R. 1stw.*) I led out there.

MARK. (*Slowly*) No, I suppose not.

SIR J. (*Shutting window*) You see, old fellow, ours was a love match.

MARK. Damn him!

SIR J. (*Returning to R. of MARK*) And women have a way of being jealous even of a man's past.

MARK. Your wife can't be jealous of what she is ignorant.

SIR J. Well, I've told her I was no end of a scapegrace, but I've not gone into particulars. I'm so happy at home—and I find politics so absorbing, that I've almost forgotten that from twenty to twenty-five I played the very devil.

MARK. (*Seated L. C.*) Unless my memory lies I followed the same interesting profession at the time. (*Significantly*) A man is happy who has nothing more serious to banish from his memory.

SIR J. (*Standing c.*) You mean that I have?

MARK. (*Still seated L. C.*) I confess I have in my mind what you have in yours.

SIR J. The accident which occurred the last time we met!

MARK. The accident!

SIR J. What else?

MARK. They called it by a different name in Golden Valley.

SIR J. By what name?

MARK. (*Rising*) By—er—well, it's an ugly word! We had better change the subject. (*Cross R.*)

SIR J. No, Cross—we will not change the subject—let us be honest with each other. Never mind ugly words so long as they represent the truth.

MARK. As you like. The subject is less painful to me than to you.

SIR J. (c.) What did they say of me when I left Golden Valley?

MARK. They said that Gentleman Jack had murdered Felix Strong and made tracks.

SIR J. (c.) They said I had murdered him?

MARK. That was the ugly word.

SIR J. But you were able to point out their mistake.

MARK. I—my dear fellow, you over-rate my ability.

SIR J. But you were present. You and Strong's brother were among those who saw the affair.

MARK. That's true. (*Sits in chair* R. C.)

SIR J. And you both must have known that when I fired at Strong I had no thought of killing—that it was a silly attempt to frighten him.

MARK. I assure you I learn this now for the first time.

SIR J. (L. of MARK) Remember, man—remember! When he fell we all ran together, we found him dead. Remember what I said then?

MARK. I really don't remember your saying anything. I only know you disappeared into the mountains.

SIR J. I swore to you then that it was an accident. I had no more thought of killing the poor devil than of killing you. (*Coming down L.—stopping short L. C.*) I didn't even take aim at him!

MARK. It was a remarkably fine shot. (*Still in chair. Pause*)

SIR J. (*Coming to him*) Do you, Cross, think I meant to kill him?

MARK. Now that I have your assurance to the contrary, of course I can't.

SIR J. But you did until now?

MARK. (*Looking up at him*) Well, I confess I shared the opinion of Golden Valley. The impression was that you lined your man by the old Redwood Tree and shot him in his tracks. Unfortunately, you and Felix Strong had quarreled over the cards the night before. You had both—to put it mildly—used expressions calculated to wound the feelings of the most thick-skinned—and some shooting was expected when you again met—fair shooting. The result was a shot—a death—and an escape.

SIR J. I was an idiot to run away. That told against me. I've regretted it for ten years. (*Sits L. C.*)

MARK. You'd have regretted not having done so for about as many minutes.

SIR J. What do you mean?

MARK. (*Rising and going to him*) That they'd have strung you up on that same old Redwood Tree. (*Pause*) You must be aware of that, Harding—you haven't forgotten the Golden Valley crowd; honest manly scoundrels for the most part—with a crude and

homely, but roughly poetic sense of justice; with no gift for the analysis of motives, and a sublime ignorance of psychological principles—but with a marvelous quickness to realize facts—to arrive at decisions—and to execute them—You remember the case of the Chinaman, Tin War? (*The last sentence in subdued, significant voice*)

SIR J. Yes, yes, it was horrible. Let us speak no more of it. Now when I realize what a terrible danger I was in I'm not ashamed to confess I shudder. Thank God the danger has long since passed.

MARK. (r. c.) Passed! My dear Harding, it is not always a safe thing to shoot a man who has a brother.

SIR J. Simeon!

MARK. In some cases it might be all right. The brother might thank you for your trouble and be quite pleased. It's all a matter of luck.

SIR J. (l. in chair) Cross, for God's sake, tell me what you are driving at?

MARK. (r. c.) Simply this. Felix Strong's brother, happened to be a twin—further, he chanced to be animated by the warmest feelings of affection for his twin brother whom you killed.

SIR J. I remember. What then?

MARK. Then it follows that he is not animated by the warmest feelings towards you.

SIR J. Well?

MARK. He still lives. For that unacceptable circumstance I am partly responsible. We had a big flood in the Valley after you left, and it was my lot to save Simeon Strong from drowning.

SIR J. Do you mean that he still harbours revenge against me?

MARK. He certainly did when I last saw him in New York, two years since. For your sake I hope you won't meet him.

SIR J. What could he do?

MARK. Do?—Have you handed over to the American authorities on the charge of murdering his brother.

SIR J. (Rising quickly) Cross, you can't be serious!

MARK. I never was more so. Simeon Strong, is now a millionaire and a big man in New York. I hope his views have changed, because—(Pauses)

SIR J. (l. c.) Well?

MARK. (c.) I expect him in London daily. However, you may not meet him. He doesn't even know who Sir John Harding is, and it is so easy to go to

Paris when you don't wish to meet a man who is in London.

SIR J. I would not cross the street to avoid him.
(Cross r. c.)

MARK. Ah well, you know best!

SIR J. If it must be, we shall meet. Being innocent I will not struggle to avoid any man. But I'm glad you've told me these things, Cross, although they are serious. (Coming c.) And I'm really glad to have met you again. (Aside as he goes up stage) My God! if Helen should know this! (Aloud) Let's go and smoke a cigar together.

(Exits r. 2. w.)

MARK looks after him thoughtfully for a moment, then shrugs his shoulders and follows him.

(Exeunt r. 2. w.)

(Enter GENERAL M. and KATE L. up steps)

KATE. You see Mrs. Cross hasn't come yet. Aren't you anxious, Papa? (Coming down r.)

GEN. (Going to seat l.) My dear, I am anxious about nothing. I only want rest.

KATE. You've been resting all the afternoon. (Bus. at seat)

GEN. (L.) Have I? I don't think, my dear, that your presence is conducive to relaxation.

KATE. Thank you, Papa. You mean that I'm a bore.

GEN. Not exactly that, perhaps—but you have an active mind, which finds unremitting expression.

KATE. I don't understand that—but it sounds uncomplimentary. If you are tired of me, Papa, I wonder you don't get me married. (Crossing r. c.)

GEN. That is not such an easy matter.

KATE. Why? I'm nice! (Sits r. c.)

GEN. Perhaps—but still yours is a difficult case to meet. First of all you require a man who is a good listener—a very rare thing. He must also have unlimited patience and equanimity, and the enormous power of endurance of the ordinary mule.

KATE. Thank you, Papa—I don't want him. I think you are very unkind. I've suffered enough already considering that you are the only companion I have ever had.

GEN. However, I'll try and find you a husband as you

wish it, although it's rather cowardly to shift one's burdens on to other shoulders.

(SERVANT enters R. U. E. *announcing*)

SERV. Mrs. Cross.

KATE. (*Rises*) Papa—at last! (*Crosses L.*)

(SERVANT *exits*)

(Enter MRS. CROSS and SIMEON STRONG R. U. E.)

MRS. C. How do you do, General Merryweather? (*Introducing Strong to General*) Allow me to present Mr. Strong—General Merryweather. (*Coming down*) And you, Kate? Not quite tired of London yet?

KATE. No. Papa has taken care of that.

MRS. C. Oh! how is that?

KATE. He has taken me out as little as possible.

MRS. C. Let me present an old friend of Mark's—who arrived from America scarcely an hour ago. Mr. Simeon Strong—Miss Merryweather. (*They bow*) Has Mark called?

GEN. (L.) I don't know, but he may have while Kate was torturing me in the garden. (To STRONG) Mr. Cross is a friend of yours?

STRONG. (R.) When a man has pulled you out of a raging flood at the risk of his own life, you are apt to reckon him among your friends.

GEN. (L.) I suppose that is so.

MRS. C. (C.) I won't allow my son to be praised. He is a most undeserving person—reserved, mysterious, erratic eccentric! Now, I ask you—could he have a nicer mother than he has?

OMNES Impossible!

MRS. C. I was sure you would say so. Yet he refuses to live in my house. Prefers to have rooms of his own. He amuses himself and alarms me by mysteriously disappearing for months at a time, until when I dread to look at the list of killed and injured in a railway or steamboat accident, he coolly walks in one day and says—"Good morning, mother, may I breakfast with you?"

GEN. He seems to be an original!

MRS. C. And yet I know he loves me—and I love him. Mothers are weak, you know.

(Enter LADY H. R. 2. W., followed by SERVANT who brings on tea)

STRONG. In this case, Mrs. Cross, I share your weakness.

LADY H. (*To Mrs. C. who meets her up R. C.*) I'm so pleased you have come.

MRS. C. How are you? Quite well? Now you must promise not to fail me to-morrow night.

LADY H. I can do that. I am going to the House to hear John's speech after dinner, and I shall bring him on with me to your party.

MRS. C. Let me present a friend of Mark's, who has just arrived from America. Mr. Strong—Lady Harding.

LADY H. (*Coming down R.*) You come from America, Mr. Strong? My husband spent some years there.

STRONG. Indeed!

LADY H. Did you ever chance to meet?

STRONG. The pleasure of meeting your husband is still before me.

LADY H. (*To Mrs. C.*) Let me give you some tea, dear. (*Crosses to tea-table*)

(*Mrs. Cross comes down to tea table*)

STRONG. (*Turns and crosses to Kate, who is standing by table L.*) Miss Merryweather, Mrs. Cross has invited me to her "At Home" to-morrow evening, shall I have the pleasure of meeting you there?

(*Mrs. Cross gives cup and saucer to MERRYWEATNER*)

KATE. (*Turning to chair L.*) Yes, we are all going. Mrs. Cross's parties are always jolly, aren't they?

STRONG. I'm sure they must be, but I've never been in England before you know.

KATE. (*In chair L.*) Haven't you? How strange! I don't think I've met an American before.

STRONG. Haven't you? I want to know! That statement makes me somewhat nervous. (*LADY H. brings tea to LADY H.*) Permit me! (*Bus.*)

KATE. But I know that you are all free and enlightened, and mostly very rich. (*STRONG gives her cup*) I suppose you are very rich?

STRONG. Perhaps I ought to confess at once—so as not to sail under false colours—that I'm a millionaire. I'm very sorry. (*Drinking tea*)

KATE. There is surely nothing to be sorry for in that.

STRONG. Well, millionaires are so common now-a-days, that I thought it was bad form to be one or know one.

KATE. I don't think it will ever be bad form to be rich.

STRONG. You relieve my mind immensely. I'm really delighted to have met you, Miss Merryweather.

KATE. Why?

STRONG. I'm afraid I haven't known you long enough yet to venture to pay you compliments. (*Putting cup on table*)

KATE. Then I hope you will have known me long enough very soon. (*Giving cup*.)

STRONG. I consider that likely. (*Puts cup on L. table*)

KATE. (*Aside*) He's very nice. (*Rises and goes up stage*)

(Enter MARK and SIR JOHN HARDING, conservatory
R. 2. w.)

MARK. (*Coming down R.*) Simeon!

SIR J. (*Meeting Mrs. Cross c.*) How do you do, Mrs. Cross?

STRONG. (L. C. MARK crossing to STRONG) At last! My dear boy, this is a real pleasure for me.

MARK. (*Shaking hands*) And for me. How are you?

STRONG. Fine as silk. (MUSIC) And you?

SIR J. (*To LADY H.*) (LADY H. is R.) Who is that?

LADY H. A friend of Mr. Cross's. He will introduce you.

STRONG. (*To MARK*) Now introduce me to your friend Harding.

MARK. With pleasure. (*Aside*) At least I am not to blame—Harding! (*Crosses to SIR JOHN, who has come down R.*) It is Simeon Strong. Keep cool—he may not remember you. (*They return to STRONG*) Mr. Strong, Sir John Harding. (*Slips back, goes up stage*)

STRONG. (*Crossing to SIR J.*) It is always a pleasure to meet a man of your distinction, Sir John.

(HARDING bows and offers his hand. STRONG is about to take it. Looks HARDING in the face—but suddenly pauses, looks still more closely at HARDING—then falls back)

STRONG. (R. C., with his hand behind him) No, thank you, sir, I can't touch it.

SIR J. (R.) Why not?

STRONG. (R. C.) Because there is blood on it, the

THE IDLER.

blood of my brother Felix. (*In a whisper*) Hate is a good detective. I know you, Gentleman Jack!

MABK. (L. of STRONG—to STRONG) Silence, for God's sake, not a word before the ladies. (*Moves L.*)

LADY H. (*Coming down c.*) Mr. Strong, we must see you often while you are in London.

STRONG. (*Embarrassed*) Thank you, Lady Harding—thank you!

MRS. CROSS GENERAL KATE

STRONG LADY H.

SIR JOHN MABK.

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE:—MRS. CROSS' “*At Home*”. Room in Mrs. CROSS' House.

(MRS. GLYNN-STANMORE and KATE MERRYWEATHER *discovered.*)

KATE. (*Coming down stage c.*) Papa is so angry with you, Mrs. Stanmore.

MRS. G.-S. Indeed. Why? (*At fireplace*)

KATE. I told him you said it was a bad sign when elderly men wore flowers.

MRS. G.-S. (*Coming down*) You terrible child, I shan't be able to say anything before you in future.

KATE. Oh, please do. I won't repeat again. I so enjoy what you say.

MRS. G.-S. Why?

KATE. Because you say such unkind things about other people.

MRS. G.-S. Kate, I'm afraid you're inclined to be a very wicked girl.

KATE. (*Coming over to settee*) Perhaps I am.

MRS. G.-S. I'm sorry you repeated what I said in fun of your father.

KATE. Why?

MRS. G.-S. I wanted him to like me.

KATE. Why, are you tired of being a widow?

MRS. G.-S. I wasn't thinking of that.

KATE. Of course not. But *are you*?

MRS. G.-S. Perhaps I am—just a little.

KATE. Isn't it good fun?

MRS. G.-S. It was for a time. But on the whole I find the joys of widowhood are overrated.

KATE. Then why don't you marry again?

MRS. G.-S. I mean to. Men seem to like widows best.

KATE. Why?

MRS. G.-S. I can't explain to you now. I mean to marry again all the same.

KATE. And lose all your delightful liberty?

MRS. G.-S. Oh no, I think not. But experience begets caution, and it behoves a widow to be wary.

KATE. You *are* looking for a husband then? (*In front of piano R.*)

MRS. G.-S. Possibly.

KATE. Whose husband, Mrs. Stanmore?

MRS. G.-S. Naughty—you oughtn't to know of those things at your age. I was going to say that what is particularly necessary in a second husband is docility—a virtue too rare among men now-a-days. You haven't noticed it of course.

KATE. I can only judge by *papa*.

MRS. G.-S. Is he docile?

KATE. Pretty well. I can manage him—but he is old.

MRS. G.-S. Only fifty-eight, dear.

KATE. (*Aside, going down R.*) She must have been making enquiries.

MRS. G.-S. He seems to me to have a most amiable and charming temper.

KATE. He has. (*Aside*) Ah, I understand. What fun! I'll fool her! (*Aloud*) Mrs. Stanmore, I'll tell you (*Crossing L. C.*) something about *papa*, if you won't tell any one. (*Kneeling by her*)

MRS. G.-S. Do; I'll keep it so secret.

KATE. (c.) I believe he's in love.

MRS. G.-S. Really? With whom?

KATE. With a widow.

MRS. G.-S. A widow. Who can she be?

KATE. I believe you know more about it than I do. (*Rising*) How sly you widows are! Here is Mr. Strong. (*Going R.*)

MRS. G.-S. (*Rising and going R.*) Shall I ask him to my party to-morrow night?

(STRONG enters L. goes up C.)

I mean for your sake?

KATE. If you like. (*Aside, goes R.*) He shall not go.
(*Up to piano*)

MRS. G.-S. (*To STRONG who is coming down c.*) I have a little party to-morrow evening, Mr. Strong. Will you accept a very unceremonious invitation and come?
STRONG. You are very kind, Mrs. Stanmore.

(*Piano ff. KATE who is playing piano, vigorously shakes her head at STRONG, unseen by Mrs. G.-S.*)

MRS. G.-S. I'm sorry I hadn't the opportunity of giving you longer notice, but I hope you will be able to come.

(*KATE still shakes her head*)

STRONG. Thank you very much. I shall be delighted.
(*Piano ff. Bus.*) But I regret to say I have other engagements.

MRS. G.-S. How provoking! But perhaps you may come in late—(*Piano fff.*) you will hear the Austrian Band.

STRONG. You tempt me—(*Bus.*) but unfortunately my whole evening will be occupied.

MRS. G.-S. I'm very sorry. (*Going R. to KATE*) What an unsatisfactory person.

(*Goes up stage and Exits R. U. E.*)

STRONG. (*Crossing to KATE at piano—bus.*) Why am I not to go to Mrs. Stanmore's party?

KATE. I don't know. (*Stops playing*)

STRONG. But you shook your head when she asked me.

KATE. Did I?

STRONG. I observed you doing so with considerable energy. Come, Miss Merryweather, own up to the truth.

KATE. I didn't want you to go.

STRONG. That was quite evident. May I ask why?

KATE. Because Mrs. Stanmore wanted you to.

STRONG. Oh! Are you going?

KATE. Yes.

STRONG. Then you don't want to meet *me!*

KATE. Yes, I do; but I sacrificed the pleasure of meeting you to the joy of annoying Mrs. Stanmore. (*Rising*)

STRONG. Ah—like a woman that! I'm beginning to understand. (*Goes c.*)

KATE. (*Following him*) And perhaps I've saved you from a terrible fate.

STRONG. Why, is there going to be an explosion round there?

KATE. Mrs. Stanmore is dangerous. She wants to marry again. (*Crossing L.*)

STRONG. Indeed! That's very sad. (*Follows KATE to L. C.*) How did you discover it?

KATE. Haven't I eyes?

STRONG. You have. That is a circumstance which hasn't failed to strike me. (*Looking into them*)

KATE. Well, I keep my eyes open. (*Sits couch c.*)

STRONG. (*Looking into her eyes*) I'm real glad of that, Miss Merryweather.

KATE. I've seen Mrs. Stanmore carefully set her cap at several people—including papa. Why, last season her attentions to John—who wasn't married then, you know—were most conspicuous.

STRONG. Who is John?

KATE. John is my brother-in-law—Sir John Harding. (*Still on settee c.*)

STRONG. (*With sudden change of manner*) Oh, I had forgotten that. You have a way, Miss Merryweather, of making one forget things.

KATE. Have I?

STRONG. (*Turning R.*) But there are some things which may never be forgotten.

KATE. (*Still on settee*) Why have you turned so serious, Mr. Strong? I like you better when you smile.

STRONG. (*Returning to her*) Sir John Harding is your brother-in-law then? That is a close connection.

KATE. Really my step brother-in-law. Lady Harding is my step-sister. (*Pause*) Well, I'm very sorry you've grown so serious, (*Rising and going L.*) because we were getting on so nicely together—and I thought Americans were really fond of talking.

(MRS. CROSS Enters R. U. E. comes down C. KATE goes L. STRONG R.)

MRS. C. (*To KATE down L.*) Kate, Signor Victorini is going to sing again. You mustn't let Mr. Strong miss this song.

KATE. Do you mean the little man with the black curls?

MRS. C. Yes. (*Coming round from back of sofa L.*)

KATE. I wouldn't miss watching him sing for any-

thing. (*Goes up c. then down again. Apart to Mrs. C.*) What do you think is the latest?

(Enter MERRYWEATHER L. U. E.)

Mrs. Stanmore wants to marry papa. Isn't it fun? (*Aside*) Now I've done it! (*Going up*) Let us go, Mr. Strong. (*Bus.*) Papa, here's Mrs. Cross. Your moustache is out of curl.

(*Exeunt STRONG and KATE c. off R. talking as they go*)

(MRS. C. is following them, goes c.)

GEN. Please don't leave me, Mrs. Cross. (*Coming down to her c.*)

MRS. C. I have so many guests.

GEN. Spare me two minutes. I want you, if you will be good enough, to settle an anxious question for me.

MRS. C. Question? What is it? (*Crossing to sofa L. c.*)

GEN. Am I, or am I not, an objectionable man?

MRS. C. (*Sitting*) The question is somewhat abrupt and singular. I'm afraid some one has been calling you names.

GEN. (*Sitting on settee*) No—but I've arrived at that age when a man begins to doubt whether he is an agreeable person or not.

MRS. C. I thought a man never arrived at that age.

GEN. I have, I assure you. Of the numbers of elderly men I see daily, quite nine out of ten appear to me to be objectionable. They look selfish, hard and sour—and each new old man I see I ask myself—am I like that?

MRS. C. You wish me to tell you then?

GEN. Simply if you think me a very disagreeable person.

MRS. C. That's impossible. If I thought you very disagreeable, my politeness would not permit me to tell you. If I thought you altogether the reverse—my modesty would keep me silent.

GEN. But I have a very serious object in asking the question.

MRS. C. (*Aside*) Hem! Mrs. Stanmore, I suppose. (*Aloud*) And that object?

GEN. I am anxious to know whether in my old age you consider me sufficiently agreeable to admit of my thinking of—er—of—marrying again?

MRS. C. Oh, you are making a confidence. (*Rising and crossing R. c.*) But why to me, General?

GEN. (*Rising*) To whom else should I offer it, dear Mrs Cross? (*Coming L. of her*)

MRS. C. You have made your choice?

GEN. I have. I only fear that I have been too ambitious. (*Goes up c.*) You see I—

MRS. C. I see you want to enlist my assistance?

GEN. (*Comes down*) How can I do without it? You see I am no better than a novice.

MRS. C. (*Smiling*) And yet you are not without experience.

GEN. My third choice proves that.

MRS. C. General, (*Coming a little towards him*) you shall have my assistance. It is my duty as hostess to try and please my guests. Wait where are a few moments. (*Going up stage c.*)

(*Exit c. off R.*)

GEN. (*Coming down and sitting on sofa*) "It is her duty as hostess to try and please her guests." How delightful! How charmingly put! She is mine! I'm a lucky man. Here I am at nearly sixty making for the third time in my life, a splendid conquest! Dear! dear! Why is it that these things comes so easily to me? What is there about my personality to account for it? I suppose it must be that vague negative quality called "charm—personal charm." A something that unaccountably pleases and attracts—a sort of unconscious magnetism. Humph! A useful thing to have about one. (*Rising*) It has secured for my old age a delightful wife and companion—no giddy girl, to cause perpetual anxiety.

(*Enter MRS. GLYNN-STANMORE R. U. E. smiling and looking at GENERAL who is well down R. with great gratification*)

No lady of uncertain age, and frivolous tendencies—but a woman of sense—of experience—of dignity and repose. (*Crossing R.*)

MRS. G.-S. My dear General—(*L. c. up at settee—coming down c.*)

GEN. (*R. down stage*) Ah, you have returned. (*Turns round and sees MRS. G.-S.*) Oh, it is you, Mrs. Stanmore.

MRS. G.-S. (*R. c.*) Yes, I have come. I am deeply im-

pressed with a sense of the compliment you have paid me. (*Coming down*)

GEN. A compliment, Mrs. Stanmore?

MRS. G.-S. Certainly. From such a man as you, I consider it a great compliment. Mrs. Cross has told me all.

GEN. Oh, she has?

MRS. G.-S. Yes. Did you not intend her to? (*Crossing to settee L. C.*)

GEN. Well, I really—

MRS. G.-S. You see we are such old friends. (*Sitting*)

GEN. (*Going a little up stage*) Oh yes, of course—old friends—and she told you? (*Aside*) Women will do that sort of thing.

MRS. G.-S. Yes. Indeed she urged me to see you at once. Of course, if I were a young girl, I should have still waited, but I am, I hope, a sensible woman, and your delicacy—your exquisite refinement in first speaking to my friend on the subject—touched and won me—so I have come.

GEN. (*Bewildered R. C.*) Really, my dear Mrs. Stanmore—

MRS. G.-S. Jane!

GEN. I beg pardon.

MRS. G.-S. Call me Jane!

GEN. Your name, you mean?

MRS. G.-S. Yes—Jane. You shall call me what you like. Won't you sit down?

GEN. (*Crossing to her*) Oh, thank you. (*Sitting*) Do I understand, then—er—

MRS. G.-S. (*Bending her head modestly*) Hush! Not another word. You needn't repeat to me what you said to Mrs. Cross.

GEN. (*Rather warmly*) I assure you I had no such intention.

MRS. G.-S. I might have known that. Your refinement of feeling is too great. As for my answer, my presence here must dispel any doubt you may have had. (*Bends towards him and gives him her hand*) William, you are answered.

GEN. (*Takes her hand very bewildered*) Really—you are very charming—but

MRS. G.-S. Ah, stop, I won't allow compliments. Remember, we are sensible people—and compliments only become really valuable *after marriage*, don't you think so?

GEN. Yes—oh yes—quite so.

MRS. G.-S. I wonder, William—

GEN. So do I.

MRS. G.-S. I wonder how we shall agree about spending the year? (*Bus.*) Christmas in the country, of course, and London in the Spring. But I do so love Paris. Do you like Paris, William?

GEN. Oh yes, very much. I should recommend you to go to Paris.

MRS. G.-S. We agree then on that? How lovely!

GEN. (*Aside, rising and going R.*) Great Heavens! The woman thinks I want to marry her! (*Aloud*) Mrs. Stanmore, I—er—I—have something serious to say to you. (*Going up a little*)

MRS. G.-S. (*Rising*) What is it, dear Willie?

GEN. I wouldn't for worlds say anything that might be interpreted as other than—er—an expression of a deep sense, you know, but the fact is—

MRS. G.-S. Let's go and hear the music—I'm so anxious lest our absence should be remarked upon. (*Going up stage*)

GEN. Remarked upon? Heaven forbid!

MRS. G.-S. You know people do talk—and a poor little widow can't be too careful.

GEN. Mrs. Stanmore, as a matter of fact, you are labouring under a mistake.

MRS. G.-S. A mistake? (*Pauses, looks at him. Aside, coming down L. of settee*) Great Heavens, how absurdly awkward! General—(*Crossing towards him*.)

GEN. Of course the mistake is delightfully complimentary to me—especially at my age—but—

MRS. G.-S. Complimentary, General? Do you then consider it so great a compliment to be made fun of?

GEN. Made fun of?

MRS. G.-S. Exactly. You didn't think I was serious, did you? How eagerly you soldiers snatch at a compliment. (*Going up stage then coming down again*)

GEN. Of course, of course. (*Aside*) Confound the woman—she's clever. (*Crossing L.*) Do you think I didn't know that you were chaffing me?

MRS. G.-S. No, I don't believe you did.

GEN. A good joke. Ha! ha! But, by Jove, I'd rather you'd been serious.

MRS. G.-S. Really? (*seated on settee*)

GEN. Yes, indeed. But now, alas! "It's all over between us"—as young lovers say when they quarrel. (*Standing beside her*)

MRS. G.-S. Do you then resign all hope?

GEN. I must—because I know a woman could never love a man of whom she'd tried to make a fool.

MRS. G.-S. My dear General, I'll confide in you as I would in—say a father.

GEN. Delightful of you!

MRS. G.-S. (*Rising*) Well, had you been twenty-five years younger, I might—yes, really I might—(*Laughing and going up stage*)

GEN. You will pay me compliments. (*Going up stage*)

MRS. G.-S. I might have thought about it. But May and December. Oh, impossible! Good night, dear December!

(*Exit R. U. E.*)

GEN. (c.) She almost succeeded in making me look ridiculous. A damned dangerous woman.

(*Exit L.*)

(*Enter MARK and STRONG L. U. E.*)

STRONG. If you don't accept my proposal I shall be disappointed in you.

MARK. Do you want to get rid of me, Simeon?

STRONG. Certainly not.

MARK. Then why send me to the far North—where I should be frozen to death? (*In chair R. C.*)

STRONG. (*Sitting on settee*) If there were no danger in the expedition, I would not ask you to go—because I know it wouldn't suit you. Now tell me—what are you doing in London?

MARK. Nothing.

STRONG. You mean loafing—

MARK. Yes!

STRONG. Does it pan out well?

MARK. (R. C.) No.

STRONG. Nothing in it, eh?

MARK. Nothing.

STRONG. I thought not. My dear Mark, you make me tired. The genuine loafer is born, not made. To loaf successfully requires certain negative qualities which you don't possess. You are naturally a restless, adventurous spirit, and a long spell at loafing would lead you to the devil. Give it up, my boy—it's a bad scheme. (*Rising*)

MARK. Perhaps you are right, Simeon—but I've had troubles and disappointments lately.

STRONG (*Crossing to him R. C.*) Of course. You

haven't told me of them—that's not your way—but I guessed as much. Well, to a man with troubles, an invitation to the North Pole ought to be a godsend.

MARK. The North Pole?

STRONG. Well, my expedition will go into the neighbourhood at least. Will you join it? (*Crossing to settee again*)

MARK. If you were going now—

STRONG. (*Sitting on settee*) I wish I could, but I have a petroleum well, a railway, a newspaper, a fruit canning manufactory, and a silver mine to look after. Besides, I'm on the look out for a wife.

MARK. A wife? And you must have a Polar expedition as well? Simeon, you're ambitious.

STRONG. I am. I want to be heard of all round. I'm going to knock corners off this earth before I get through. If my millions prevent me from doing anything great, I can at least pay other people to do it. (*Rising and going over to MARK*) Mark, don't miss this affair—it's the biggest scheme on record. People are tired of Central Africa—it's time the old North Pole had a look in again. My expedition is going close—and don't you forget it. We're going to make people sit up and consider.

MARK. What, on the north pole?

STRONG. Yes. You, my boy, shall, if you like, go as my representative.

MARK. (*Rising*) Thank you, Simeon.

STRONG. (*Offers hand*) You accept?

MARK. (*About to take it*) I—I will consider.

STRONG. Well, that's a point in my favour. You see, my dear boy—

(*Enter HARDING L.*)

HARDING. Ah, Cross! I'm afraid I'm late. My wife is here?

MARK. Yes, she is here.

STRONG. (*Sees HARDING—pause—to MARK*) Mark, I have something to say to this gentleman which I would like to say in your presence.

MARK. (R. C.) I hope it's nothing unpleasant.

STRONG. (C.) It's something serious.

MARK. The same thing.

(*Pause*)

STRONG Sir,—as a student of life, you may have re-

marked that when a man hates a man, he is sure to meet him again, sooner or later.

SIR J. (L. C.) Well?

STRONG. Well, Sir John Harding—Gentleman Jack—here's an example of it. I have met you again—later than I could have wished yet sooner than I could have expected.

SIR J. (*Ironically*) I am glad to be the humble means of affording you any gratification, Mr. Strong.

STRONG. Your sneer is out of place. I am speaking to you now for the purpose of offering you a courtesy.

SIR J. So far your courtesy has been conspicuously absent.

MARK. Simeon—Harding, I hope you will remember that you are under my mother's roof.

SIR J. I have not forgotten it.

STRONG. I will remember it, Mark. The courtesy I wish to offer this gentleman is this. I warn him of the proceedings—criminal proceedings—I am about to have instituted against him, so that he may have an opportunity of consulting his advisers. To-night I show my hand. You see, Sir John Harding, *I fight fair*.

SIR J. All this has reference to the accident by which your brother lost his life?

STRONG. We are speaking of the *murder* of my brother, sir.

SIR J. You are mistaken, Mr. Strong, I did *not* murder your brother.

STRONG. (C.) Observe that, Mark. Gentleman Jack did not murder my brother. Nothing at all unusual or violent occurred in the Golden Valley—June 8, 1880. No one got hurt—and no one ran away.

SIR J. (L. C.) I don't deny shooting your brother—or being fool enough to run away. I explained the matter to your friend Cross only yesterday.

MARK. (R. C.) Harding has assured me positively of the innocence of his intentions when he fired.

SIR J. (C.) On my soul, that is true. For ten years I have regretted with the deepest bitterness—till the end of my life I shall regret with the same bitterness having, in what was really a drunken frolic, fired at and killed your brother. I swear to you that I had no thought of killing him. I assure you of my profound regret and sympathy, and I ask your forgiveness. (*Extending his hand*)

MARK. Don't act hastily, Simeon. Try and forget the unfortunate incident. Of course your brother was very dear to you, but—

STRONG. (c.) No more, no more. Sir John Harding, you will have an opportunity of trying the credence of an American jury v'th your version of the story.

MARK. At least reflect before acting, Simeon. (R. c.)
STRONG. I have reflected for ten years. (*Crossing R.*)

S'R J. I have said all I can say. I have spoken the simple truth.

MARK. (c.) I am sure of that. (*To STRONG*) Come, you believe him. Don't let the fact that Sir John Harding, in his terror and confusion at the terrible moment, ran away and evaded pursuit, weigh so heavily on your mind. You might have done the same under similar circumstances. Now do delight me by shaking hands. (*Hand on STRONG's shoulder*)

STRONG. No, such a thing is impossible! (*Breaking away*)

MARK. (*To SIR J.*) Well, I've done my best. (*Going up to piano R.*)

(Enter LADY HARDING c. from R.)

STRONG. (R. c.) That is all. I am only seeking justice—only doing, for my dear brother, what he would have done for me. I am quite unable to accept your assurances, and so still have the honour of hating you.

SIR J. (L., who has risen. *Aside*) Helen—my God! how shall I tell her? (*Turns to L.*)

(MUSIC off stage)

LADY H. (*Forcing a smile—back of settee*) Gentlemen, is this a conspiracy? (*Pause—The MEN are confused*) Come, what is it? A political discussion? It might be, as you all look so fierce. (*Pause. Over settee*) Reminiscences, perhaps, of life in America. What a sad time you must have had, if I'm to judge by your faces now.

(STRONG goes up stage)

Mr. Strong, you shall tell me. (*Putting bouquet on settee*) Why this interesting gloom?

STRONG. Lady Harding, we were talking of a poor fellow we all knew, to whom I was devoted. He is now dead.

(Exit STRONG c. off R.)

(LADY H. *after looking anxiously from STRONG to MARK, turns L. to HARDING*)

(MUSIC)

SIR J. (*Aside*) I can't tell her!

(Exit L.)

LADY H. (*To MARK, quickly and anxiously*) Tell me the truth.

MARK. (*Coming down R. C.*) About what?

LADY H. (C) About that man—Mr. Strong. There is some mystery in which my husband is concerned.

MARK. (R. C.) Why do you ask *me*?

LADY H. Because you are in the secret. Don't keep it from me. There is something terrible going on—something arising from the past—the wild life you all led in America—something not good for my husband. Ah, you see I am not blind.

MARK. Why not ask your husband?

LADY H. I know that he will tell me, but I want to anticipate that. I want to know the worst so that when he tells me I may be armed with fortitude. For if he is in trouble, I will help him—if he is in danger, I will save him. (*Going L.*)

MARK. (*Turning to her*) You will save him?

LADY H. (L. C.) I will save him. Now tell me. That man hates my husband. Why?

MARK. Helen, (*Stepping towards her*) I knew you would appeal to me, I wanted you to. Yet now that you do I shrink back, I want to warn you—remember my life's a wreck—and morally I'm drifting. Drifting wrecks are dangerous.

LADY H. (C) Don't you remain my friend?

MARK. (R. C.) Yes, and more.

LADY H. My friend. Well, can't my friend pity my distress and tell me the truth?

MARK. Helen, you tempt me—and I am weak.

LADY H. Tell me. (*Pause*)

MARK. (*Facing audience*) Your husband killed a man in America.

LADY H. Ah! (*Pause*) Some terrible accident.

MARK. He pointed his revolver at him, fired, and shot him dead.

LADY H. Dead?

MARK. (R. C.) Yes. The man he killed was Simeon Strong's brother.

LADY H. Simeon Strong's brother. (*Pause*) You mean, of course that my husband fought a duel.

MARK. No.

LADY H. Not a duel?

MARK. (R. C.) Not a duel!

LADY H. You—you have dared to tell me that John—my husband is an assassin? Go on.

MARK. He declares that he had no intention of killing the man.

LADY H. He was found innocent.

MARK. He has yet to be tried.

LADY H. My God—to be tried—for an accident!

MARK. (R. C. speaking quickly) Everyone at the time regarded it as a murder.

LADY H. Well and now?

MARK. Simeon Strong is about to have your husband arrested on the charge of murdering his brother.

LADY H. (C.) He is innocent.

MARK. (R. C.) He will be judged by facts.

LADY H. (*Slightly staggering*) My God—what shall I do—what shall I do?

MARK. (*Going towards her* R. C.) (*Aloud*) Helen, Helen rouse yourself.

LADY H. I must save him. You will help me. Mr. Strong is your friend.

MARK. He is relentless. He has sworn to avenge his brother. Nothing will move him, unless—

LADY H. (*Eagerly*) Yes? (*Pause—MARK face to audience*) You said unless.

MARK. Forget it. It had no meaning. The man was shot down before my eyes. Why should I interfere?

LADY H. Save my husband—save him for my sake.

MARK. For your sake? I have no right.

LADY H. You have the right my friendship gives you.

MARK. (*Turning*) Helen—it is not enough.

LADY H. (*Falling back*) I don't understand you! (*Sits*)

MARK. (*Coming towards her, she retreats to settee*) Don't make me tell my thoughts in cold words—they are almost brutal. Don't make me show you my heart—it's black.

LADY H. (*Sitting on settee*) Tell me what you think —what you mean.

MARK. (*Coming to her*) Did I not tell you yesterday that I thought there was something of the villain in me? I know now there is. (*Bending closer to her*) Can't you see that I love you now, married as you are, more

than ever? Can't you read in my face a love that hungers for you—that is starving for you—a love that to gain you would tempt eternity. (*R. side of sofa*)

LADY H. Yes, I can see it.

MARK. Fly from me—for your trouble is my opportunity.

LADY H. (*Rise*) Yes. You are a villain. (*Crossing R.*)

MARK. (*R. c.*) I haven't told you all. Listen. I think I could save your husband. It depends upon you if I try. I had dared to think of suggesting this to you—that you come to my rooms to-morrow evening—say at ten o'clock. If I shall have failed to save your husband, you go. If I shall have succeeded—and give you proof—we leave England together.

LADY H. You are mad!

MARK. (*R. c. and up a little*) I thought, too, that you would require time to reflect—time, in which to assure yourself of your husband's peril. Then to-night, before you go, you could give me a signal to convey your decision. Say the dropping of your bouquet in my presence to mean—you will come. (*Pointing to where it lies on settee*)

LADY H. Go! (*R. c.*)

MARK. Still I shall watch your bouquet.

(MUSIC stop)

(He goes up stage)

(Enter SIR J. at door L. LADY H. is well down R.)

MARK. (*To HARDING*) Ah, Harding, your wife insisted that I should tell her the truth.

SIR J. (*Moving down L.*) Then she knows?

MARK. All.

(Exit c. off R.)

SIR J. (*Pause—in a low voice*) Helen!

LADY H. (*Shudders slightly—then suddenly stretches out her hands for him. Softly*) John! (*Bus. they meet L. c. and embrace*)

SIR J. My darling—you don't hate me then?

LADY H. Hate you? That would be impossible. But I pity you—oh, so much—so much.

SIR J. (c.) You don't think me guilty?

LADY H. (c.) I know you are innocent.

SIR J. I ought to have told you long ago—but I thought the past was closed—dead.

LADY H. The past is never dead.

SIR J. (*Still embracing her*) I was afraid to lose a particle of your love by confessing what a dreadful life I had led. Only yesterday I was tempted to tell you—but I did not dare—you were so happy.

LADY H. Yesterday is a long time ago.

SIR J. A long time!

LADY H. John, you must be saved.

SIR J. I must stand my trial. They may believe me.

LADY H. Are you sure they will?

SIR J. No. My motives were innocent—but my actions appeared guilty.

LADY H. You must not risk a trial. They would separate us—and take you away alone—and—I dare not think of it. John, we must go away.

SIR J. That is impossible.

LADY H. (*c. gradually getting near him*) Hush! We must go away together, at once—to-night—away to some obscure corner of the world. We will live there, darling, alone, just we two. We will lose the world, but we will have each other, we will lose all else but our love. John—my husband—You will have no regrets—I will make you happy. I cannot have you taken from me. It would kill me.

SIR J. My darling, we cannot do this.

LADY H. Why not?

SIR J. If I were to fly again it would be regarded as a confession of guilt. I should be pursued and arrested. No, I must meet this charge boldly—face to face—believe me, that is the wisest—the safest course. My love, try and be brave.

LADY H. (*Aside*) God help me, God help me!

SIR J. Try and smile to the world. Here's your bouquet. (*Taking it from sofa*)

(*MUSIC*)

LADY H. I don't want it now. (*Shrinking from it*) I don't want it now.

SIR J. You forget who gave it to you. (*Holds it out to her*)

(*LADY H. takes bouquet slowly—looking at her husband*)

(*Enter MRS. CROSS L. U. E.*)

We will go now. I'll order the carriage. (*Crossing to door L.*)

(Enter SIMEON STRONG R. U. E.)

MAS. C. (*Coming down stage*) You are not going, Sir John?

(Enter MARK, MRS. S., KATE R. U. E., GENERAL enters L. U. E.)

SIR J. Yes, it is quite late.

(Exits L.)

(LADY H. crosses to STRONG, who after shaking hands with MRS. CROSS has gone L.)

LADY H. Mr. Strong, you will forgive my husband? He is innocent.

STRONG. (L.) Of what, Lady Harding?

LADY H. Of intending to kill your brother.

STRONG. He will have an opportunity of proving that (L.)

LADY H. If you injure my husband, you injure me. You don't wish that? (*Pause*) Forgive him an unintentional injury. (*Pause*) He is very dear to me.

STRONG. Lady Harding, my brother was very dear to me. It is as painful for me to refuse you as for you to be refused.

(Exits L.)

(MARK is standing by piano R. with MRS. STANMORE. LADY H. stands L. C. alone for a moment)

LADY H. (*Aside*) That man can and shall save my husband. I will save myself. (*Drops bouquet, movement for MARK*)

SLOW CURTAIN

PICTURE

KATE	MRS. S.
MRS. C.	GENERAL

MARK

LADY H. SIR JOHN.

ACT III.

(MUSIC)

SCENE:—*Mark Cross's rooms, London. A bachelor's apartment opening on to balcony with a view of park beyond.*

(Discovered BENNETT, MARK'S manservant)

BEN. (At table R. C., with letters on salver) I always feel nervous while we're in London. The women is so artful. If the governor was to get collared and spliced again, it'd just break my heart. I'd just like to hear him say these three words, "Bennett, pack up." No man's safe nowadays unless he keeps moving.
(Putting letters on table)

(Enter MARK L. door)

MARK. Has anyone called?

BEN. No, sir; but there are a few letters here.

(MARK crosses R., hands BENNETT his hat and overcoat)

(Exit BENNETT L.)

MARK. (At table R.) Simeon is almost due. He won't fail me at least. Will Helen? Perhaps. Will she leave her husband for the sake of saving his life? Will she ever love me as I once thought she did?

(Enter MRS. CROSS L. door)

MRS. C. (Coming to L. C.) Now, my dear boy, are you ready?

MARK. (Turning) For what, mother?

MRS. C. (C.) To come with me to Mrs. Glynn-Stanmore's party.

MARK. No, I'm not.

MRS. C. (Coming towards him gradually) But you almost promised me.

MARK. But not quite.

MRS. C. (Putting cloak on arm of sofa) No, you never quite promise me anything. But I've found you sometimes open to persuasion—that's why I've called.

MARK. (R. C.) Don't try this time, mother.

MRS. C. (C.) Why not?

MARK. (*Turning to her*) Because failure is so unpleasant. Sit down, mother.

MRS. C. (*Sitting R. c. chair*) It's better to try and fail than not to try at all.

MARK. (*Crossing L.*) By no means. Failure is the unpardonable sin.

MRS. C. You won't come with me then?

MARK. I can't. (*Sits L. on couch*)

MRS. C. I'm sorry. (*Rising and going to him*) Might an anxious mother ask her boy's reasons for refusing her?

MARK. Certainly; but her boy would decline to bore his charming mother with uninteresting details.

MRS. C. Very pretty, but very unsatisfactory. I wish you were young enough and small enough for me to beat you. (*Kisses him*)

MARK. I wish so too.

MRS. C. (*Going round to back of sofa*) Mark, do you love me?

MARK. (*Still sitting on sofa*) I ought to, mother, for you are the only being I know worth loving.

MRS. C. Then why am I not your confidante?

MARK. Because I have no interesting confidences to offer you.

MRS. C. (*In chair side of sofa L.*) Hush! you shouldn't prevaricate with your mother. You inherit your poor father's fault of over reserve. You hug your thoughts, your secrets, your troubles close against your own heart. Perhaps sometimes they hurt you. You give those who love you no opportunity of showing their love, their sympathy—of helping you to bear a trouble —of sharing with you a joy. I have often and often said to myself "Why does my boy choose to bear his burdens alone, while I am alive to share them?"

MARK. My dear mother, you are quite wrong. I have no burdens to bear—no joys to share with you.

MRS. C. (*Rising*) I know I'm right. I'll give you an instance. You never told me of your marriage to that horrible woman till she was dead.

MARK. (*Rising*) I wanted to spare you pain. (*Going c.*)

MRS. C. You don't understand that helping to bear the child's pain is the mother's greatest joy. We've not been together enough of late, dear. (*Sits on sofa*)

MARK. (*Crossing to her*) I feel now, mother, that we've never been together enough.

MRS. C. (*Seated on sofa*) Mind you, I don't blame you for not wearing your heart on your sleeve; but

there's a medium between wearing it on your sleeve and concealing it in your boots. At any rate, it ought to be visible to your mother sometimes. I wish I could see it now. (*Taking his hand*)

MARK. You would find it very uninteresting.

MRS. C. I don't think so.

MARK. You would. (*Going slowly to fireplace*) I'm sure you would.

MRS. C. (*Rising*) Well, if you won't go with me, I suppose I must go by myself. (*Pause*) Mark, you haven't told me, by the way, what you think of Lady Harding.

MARK. Lady Harding?.... She hasn't changed much since I—since we first knew her. (*Going down R.*)

MRS. C. (R. C.) Have you? (*Significantly*)

MARK. (R.) In what way? (*Sitting end of writing-table*)

MRS. C. You used to like her.

MARK. (*Turning away*) Yes. (*Slowly*)

MRS. C. I sometimes think you more than liked her.

MARK. Was it ever your impression that she more than liked me?

MRS. C. Yes; but we were both mistaken it seems.

MARK. Yes, so it seems.

MRS. C. (*Going to him*) Oh, my dear, you were not badly hurt, I hope? (*Beside him*)

MARK. Why do you ask?

MRS. C. Only because I love you.

MARK. (*Forcing laugh*) Best of mothers, don't be afraid. My heart has now a thick skin.

MRS. C. Then you have nothing to reveal to your new confidante?

MARK. (*Turning to her*) Nothing.

MRS. C. Absolutely nothing?

MARK. Absolutely nothing.

(BENNETT enters L.)

BEN. Mr. Strong.

MARK. Ah, Simeon! (*Goes to fireplace*)

(Enter SIMEON STRONG L.)

STRONG. (L. C.) Mrs. Cross, this is a delightful surprise. I thought to find Mark quite alone.

MRS. C. (*Crossing to sofa*) I am just going. I can't persuade Mark to come with me, so I will leave him with you. (*Bus. with mantle*)

STRONG. I had no idea my friend Mark had such bad taste.

MRS. C. (L., *going up stage to door L.*) Mr. Strong, I look to you to keep Mark out of mischief.

MARK. He'll do that. (*Going up*)

MRS. C. Good-bye, my boy, for the present—good-bye. (*Aside*) I'm not quite satisfied. (*MARK goes to door*)

(*Exit MRS. C. L. door*)

STRONG. (c.) Well, my boy, here I am as commanded.

MARK. (R. c.) It was very good of you to come. Let us talk.

STRONG. And smoke.

MARK. (*Going up to sideboard*) And drink.

STRONG. I'll throw in a light one. (*Sitting on sofa L.*)

MARK. Whiskey and soda?

STRONG. Thank you—with a slight squeeze of lemon.

MARK. (*At sideboard*) Let me give you a cigar.

STRONG. No, thanks, I'll use one of my own. I like 'em green. (*Lighting cigar which he has taken from his own case*) Why won't you help me to do a little London to-night?

MARK. It's impossible to-night.

STRONG. Well, I couldn't expect you to soften to me after refusing your mother. That's a grand woman, Mark—a priceless treasure to a man.

MARK. (*At sideboard L.*) Have you done anything about Harding yet?

STRONG. No, I've left it over till to-morrow as you asked.

MARK. You've not altered your mind then?

STRONG. My mind is *unalterable*.

MARK. (*Back of table—aside*) It has to be altered though. (*Aloud*) Well, Simeon, this affair recalls the old days, doesn't it?—conjures up a host of memories. (*Fills glasses*) Not all painful ones, eh, Simeon?

STRONG. Don't you think a man's view of the past depends very considerably on his condition in the present? (*Bus.*)

MARK. (*Taking bottles to buffet*) Yes, that's quite true. And you accordingly should be the last to look at the past with bitterness. (*Lighting cigarette which he has taken from table L. c.*)

STRONG. I—I don't, with the exception of the one thing you know of.

MARK. (*Back of table—aside*) Always back to that.
(*Aloud*) Well, Simeon, who knows, we might have been in Golden Valley still if that old flood hadn't swept us out like a lot of rats. (*Coming R. of STRONG*)

STRONG. I would have been there still if you hadn't yanked me out of that same flood.

MARK. (*Aside*) Good.

STRONG. My memory is as green for a benefit as for an injury. My boy, we've met too seldom, but you know I don't forget. We understand each other. (*Putting out his hand*)

MARK. (*Shaking STRONG's hand*) I feel like that, Simeon.

STRONG. These things don't require to be spoken. There's a truth in the hand grip—a look in the eye—which makes you know your man, eh? Now I'll drink. (*Getting glass from table.*) Here's to us. (*They clink glasses and drink*)

MARK. Right!—what is sentiment without whiskey? (*Pause—he sits on back of chair R. C.*) Simeon, if I were to ask a favour of you, I don't think you'd refuse me.

STRONG. (*Laying down glass, still seated on settee*) I opine I wouldn't.

MARK. Well, I'll ask a favour—simply as man to man—friend to friend.

STRONG. Ask it then as friend to friend, and understand it's already granted.

MARK. Whatever it may be? (*Rising and putting glass on table L. C.*)

STRONG. Whatever it may be.

MARK. Good! You're a white man. (*Goes back to desk and arranges writing materials*) Sit down and write.

STRONG. (*Crosses and sits at writing table R., lays down cigar*) I'm with you. Consider me your clerk—and fire away.

MARK. (*At fireplace*) I want you to write a letter. Address it from your hotel—with the date.

(SIMEON writes. MARK sits in chair at fireplace)

STRONG. All right.

MARK. Say "To Sir John Harding." (*SIMEON looks up—pause*) Go on.

STRONG. Did I understand you to say Sir John Harding?

MARK. That's what I said. (STRONG *pauses thoughtfully, then writes slowly*) Have you written that?

STRONG. Yes.

MARK. Then proceed—"Sir", (STRONG *writes and repeats as he writes*) "After deep and earnest reflection and consultation with my friend Mark Cross—(Rising and coming R. C.) who was a witness of the painful and lamentable incident we discussed in our conversation of yesterday—I mean the death of my brother in Golden Valley—I have come to the conclusion that, in entertaining feelings of resentment towards you—" (Pause. During speech MARK crosses slowly down stage R. C. then to L. C.)

STRONG. Well, what next?

MARK. (Facing audience) "I have been doing you an injustice."

STRONG. (Looking up—pause) Are you serious in asking me to write this?

MARK. Perfectly serious.

STRONG. I'm very sorry, but it can't be done. (Rising)

MARK. (C.) Remember you have already granted me my little favour.

STRONG. (R. of MARK) This is not a little favour—this is something I have not the power to grant—unless I break my oath—abandon a sacred duty. You said you would ask a favour as friend to friend. Is it as friend that you ask me to act the coward and liar to myself—to insult my brother's memory by forgiving and blessing his murderer?

MARK. (Standing C.) Yes, it is as a friend that I ask you to forget and forgive a painful accident which cost your brother his life, you years of sorrow, and John Harding years of remorse. As a friend I ask you to break the hasty oath of a revengeful heart—to forget the sorrow which the death of one man brought you, in the consolation of having spared another. (Puts his hand on STRONG's shoulder)

STRONG. (Moving away to R. side of R. table) Mark, it gives me real pain to refuse you, but I must. I want justice—not vengeance as you think—but justice on the man who killed my brother—and, by God, I mean to have it. (Bus.) That remark closes the subject. (Sits in chair R. After a pause, picks up cigar from table, finding that it has gone out, says) Pass the matches, old man.

MARK. (Gets match from table L. C., strikes it for him) Simeon! (Comes close to him R. and lays his

hand on his shoulder) The subject can't be closed just yet. By refusing to grant me this favour you make my position a very painful one.

STRONG. Why, what is this Harding to you?

MARK. He is nothing—although, on my soul, after hearing his story I believe him to be innocent.

STRONG. A jury shall decide that.

MARK. (*Crossing l. c.*) I don't know how to say what I must—you will think me mean, you will hate me.

STRONG. That's not likely. Let's hear it.

MARK. (*c.*) Well, your refusal compels me to claim as a right which I have just asked as a favour. Yet you know me well enough to be sure that, if I had ever done you a service, I should be the last man in the world to claim a return, a reward—unless under great stress of circumstances.

STRONG. (*Rising*) Mark! (*Facing him over desk*)

MARK. I see you understand me. (*Pause*)

STRONG. Perhaps, but I may mistake. Say your meaning bluntly.

MARK. I claim from you the life of John Harding in return for the life I gave you. (*Pause*)

STRONG. Mark, ask me something else—anything but this.

MARK. I require nothing else.

STRONG. You can't know how much it is you ask me to give up.

MARK. I do know.

STRONG. And yet insist?

MARK. Yes.

STRONG. Tell me why. (*Pause*)

MARK. I cannot. If you think I ask more than I have claim to—(*Goes up l. c.*)

STRONG. I? God forbid! I was only thinking of my brother.

MARK. (*Crossing to STRONG, clasping his hand and laying his own hand on STRONG's shoulder*) Simeon, I will be your brother.

STRONG. No more! That settles it. We'll now get on with the letter. (*Coming round back of table and sitting*) Perhaps I'd better read what I've already written.

MARK. Let me. (*Side of chair*)

STRONG. (*Sitting at desk*) No, I don't mind it. (*Ironically*) I rather like it. Let me see, this is the pitch of it, "that in entertaining feelings of resentment against him I have been doing him an injustice." I

know what else you want. (*Writes*) I am to accept his expressions of regret and assure him that I have completely abandoned all intention of having him arrested. (*Blots paper*) There! will that do? (*Hands letter to MARK*)

MARK. (*Glancing over letter*) Yes—that will do. Remember this you have done for me. I am to use this letter as I like. I won't attempt to thank you now.

STRONG. (*Rising, coming to him*) Or at any time.

MARK. (*Holding out hand*) You forgive me for asking so much?

STRONG. (*Takes his hand*) You asked less than you were entitled to—yet more than I could give ungrudgingly. It is you who must forgive me.

(*The clock strikes ten*)

MARK. (*Starting*) Ten o'clock. (*Knock at door L.—Goes nearer door and listens*) Excuse me, a visitor.

STRONG. I am going. (*Lights*)

MARK. Once more forgive me. (*Turns lamp which is on a stand at door L. low down, making room very dark*) One moment, Simeon. (*Opens door L.*)

(*Enter LADY HARDING*)

(*In a whisper to her*) Hush! it is Strong, he is going.

(*STRONG, who is down L., goes straight up stage to door*)

MARK. Good night, Simeon.

STRONG. Good night, Mark.

(*Exit SIMEON at door L. MARK turns up lamp. Lights up*)

LADY H. (*Agitated*) Have you succeeded? (*Going down stage*)

MARK. (L.) I have.

LADY H. (L. c.) Where is the proof?

MARK. (L., holding STRONG's letter behind him) It is here.

LADY H. (*Steps towards him*) What is it?

MARK. It is a letter from Simeon Strong to your husband, fully exonerating him, and pledging himself to abandon proceedings.

LADY H. (R. c.) Then my husband is saved. Thank God. (*Turning away R., putting fan on table R. C.*)

MARK. He is saved if this letter reaches him. Why do you keep your veil on?

LADY H. To hide my anguish. (*Removes veil*) There, you may see my face. (*Extending hand*) You will let me take that letter to my husband?

MARK. (c.) You have forgotten. Remember our compact.

LADY H. (B. C.) I have forgotten everything but my husband's danger, remembered only that I must save him.

MARK. (*Gradually approaching*) Helen—shall I remind you? You have come to me because I have saved your husband and because I love you—to remain with me—to be to me what you would have been had you never met John Harding—my companion, my all—that was your pledge. You and I are to leave England together to-night.

LADY H. (B. C.) Why do you torture me like this? My husband is *not* saved. You hold his fate in your hands, and you are toying with it, and with my anguish. My husband must have that letter at once.

MARK. (*Goes to L. of desk*) He shall. I will send it to him. (*Ringing bell. Encloses letter in envelope.* To LADY H.) Where is he now?

LADY H. (B. C.) At home. (*Pause*)

(BENNETT enters L.)

MARK. (*Throwing down pen*) He'd know my writing. (*Crossing to BENNETT L.—to BEN.*) Take this letter to Sir John Harding—you will find him at home. It's not addressed—simply leave it for him. (*In a low voice*) without letting it be known where you come from; you understand?

BEN. Yes, sir.

MARK. Go!

(*Exit BENNETT L. door*)

LADY H. (B. C., sighs deeply—going up stage) And now, Mark, I must go.

MARK. (L. C.) You don't mean that seriously?

LADY H. (C.) You know that I cannot stay.

MARK. But your pledge?

LADY H. I have never thought of it till now. (*Turning her face away*) I have thought only of my husband.

MARK. Then you lied to me.

LADY H. It is better to break a bad pledge than do

a more infamous thing. You have saved my husband. You have now to save yourself—and me. You have to let me go back to my husband.

MARK. That is impossible.

LADY H. (*Trying to go*) Let me go.

MARK. (*Rushing quickly to door*) I cannot. (*Locks door L. and takes key, goes c.*)

LADY H. (*Leans against door, slight pause; she then laughs hysterically*) You must see as well as I do that our present position besides being dangerous, is a foolish and absurd one. Let us be wise and treat it as a jest—on your part—the whim of an eccentric man who wishes to cloak a generous action by affecting selfish motives—on my part a harmless escapade to save my husband by humoring an eccentric man. Let us part friends—I with a feeling of unending gratitude to you—you with your friendship for me not sullied and ruined by the loss of your respect. (*Offers her hand*)

MARK. (*Takes her hand*) It can't be so, Helen, it can't be so. My love has stolen my senses away. It has absorbed every other feeling. It is myself—when you are away from me, I suffer tortures. To be near you is to be happy. (*Puts his arm round her waist*) The sound of your voice, the touch of your hand, the rustle of your gown, fill me with indescribable emotion. I have waited for you—earned you by a love greater than other men know—lost you—and I have found you again. You are here in my house—pledged to me—my own! (*Embraces her*)

LADY H. (*Throwing him off*) Don't touch me. I tell you I am not and never will be yours. (*Moving to door*) Will you let me go? (*c.*)

MARK. I cannot give you up. (*Standing end of desk*)

LADY H. Remember I am your mother's friend. (*Coming down c.*)

MARK. I cannot give you up!

LADY H. (*c.*) Will you listen to me? (*MUSIC*)

MARK. (*Very softly*) I love to hear your voice. (*Moving slightly towards her*)

LADY H. (*c.*) I am alone here in your power, but I don't fear you. I am not even angry, for I have a regard for you. Once I thought this regard was love, but I was wrong; and when I met my husband, I was glad that you had gone away, as I thought, not loving me. But now you have returned, and I know that you have loved me all the time, my heart aches with sorrow for you. I won't say that your love is base. I will say

it is unhappy. What can I do? The dearest things in life to me—my love, my duty, my fondest secret hopes are bound up in my husband—and you, knowing what love is, can forgive a woman who—who acts a lie to save the man she loves. What can I do? It is not for me to be generous. The opportunity is not *mine*. It is *yours*. Save me from ruin and yourself from crime. There is a generous instinct rising in your heart as I speak. Don't stifle it, and you will bring a happiness into your life that will never die. Mark, old friend, let me go. (*Close beside him—Pause*)

MARK. (*Not moving*) You can never love me then?

LADY H. (R. C.) Never. (*Pause*)

MARK. (*Takes key from pocket, goes to door L.*) Go—go quickly!

(*Stop MUSIC*)

(*Unlocks door and is startled by someone outside*)
(*Up at L. door*) Someone on the stairs. Is that you, Bennett?

SIR J. (L. door outside) It is I, Cross.

MARK. Good God! (*Shutting door*)

LADY H. (*Has followed MARK and is now standing c. close by curtained window*) My husband!

MARK. My God!—Go on to the balcony—I will get him away at once.

(*Exit LADY HARDING C.*)

(*Mark closes curtains*)

MARK. Come in, Harding!

(*Enter HARDING L., crossing to chair R. C.*)

SIR J. Cross, I hope I don't disturb you. (*Putting hat over fan on table R. C.*)

MARK. (*Putting chair by table R. C.*) Not at all. Sit down. How are you? (*Coming towards C.*)

SIR J. (*Sitting R. C.*) I was anxious to see you for a few moments while I am still at liberty. I suppose to-morrow—or at latest, the next day—I shall be arrested.

MARK. Perhaps not. (*Sitting on sofa L. C.*)

SIR J. This terrible misfortune I could bear, Cross, if I were alone. But—I think it will kill my wife.

MARK. (*Aside L. C.*) How am I to get him away?

SIR J. I simply want to ask you one thing. If you are called upon at the trial, will your evidence be hostile to me or not? But perhaps you had rather not say?

MARK. (*Rising*) If you had stayed at home this evening, you would, I think, have received a letter which would have relieved your mind.

SIR J. A letter? From whom? From you?

MARK. No, from Simeon Strong.

SIR J. (*Rising*) From Simeon Strong? What could he have to say to me now?

MARK. Go home and see. (c.) You will find that Strong completely exonerates you.

SIR J. (R. c., *slowly*) Can this be possible?

MARK. Now, you see, the sooner you get the letter into your possession, the better. (*Going L. C.*)

SIR J. Saved! I can scarcely realise it. Who has done this? (*Pause, lays hands on MARK's shoulder*) You are the man.

MARK. I?—Nonsense!—I haven't the power. (*Turning away to L.*)

SIR J. (c.) Ah yes, you have. Didn't you tell me that you once saved his life?

MARK. Yes. We'll talk of that some other time. (*Crossing R. and moving chair*)

SIR J. I see—you don't want to be thanked. I'll go. (*Crosses to table R. c.*)

MARK. (R. c., *aside*) Thank God!

SIR J. But I must say one thing. I am afraid I have wronged you in thought. Forgive me. (*Offers his hand*)

MARK. (*Pauses a moment, then slowly takes it, R.*) Yes, I'll forgive you. Go now. We'll meet again. (*Going up stage*)

(SIR J. is going when enter MRS. CROSS L.)

MRS. C. (*Going c.*) Mark, I've been bored almost to death. You here, Sir John? I missed you at Mrs. Stanmore's. You were wise. (*Shakes hands with Sir J.*)

SIR J. (R. of MRS. C.) You met my wife, of course?

MRS. C. (c.) No, she, too, was wise and stayed away.

SIR J. (R. c., *surprised*) She left home to go.

MRS. C. (*Aside*) Dear me! I hope I haven't made mischief. (*Turns to Sir J., embarrassed*) There was such a crowd, she might easily have been there without my seeing her. (*Crossing R.*)

SIR J. That is hardly likely. (L. *aside*) Where can she have gone? (*Goes down L.*)

MARK. (*Aside to MRS. C. who is on his L.*) Do me a favour. Get rid of Harding at once.

MRS. C. Why?

MARK. Don't ask me now, only take him away. (*Going up*)

MRS. C. (*At chair R., aloud*) Well, if you have some writing to do, I'll excuse you; but Sir John I am sure will be more gallant. (*To HARDING*) Will you drive as far as my door with me? I feel rather nervous to-night. (*Crossing L. to door*)

SIR J. I shall be delighted. (*Aside, reflectively*) Strange! Where can she have gone? (*Crossing to desk R. C.*)

MRS. C. (*Turning L.*) Come, Sir John.

SIR J. (*To CROSS*) Well, good-bye. (*Takes his hat from table R. C.—under it lies his wife's fan. He looks at fan—then looks at MRS. C. To MRS. C.:*) You are leaving your fan. (*Offers it to her*)

MRS. C. (*L.*) No—oh—yes! (*Glancing at MARK*) I —(*Offers to take it*)

SIR J. (*B. C., lightly*) But no—I see you have your own. (*Puts fan down. Looks at MARK keenly—to MARK*) You haven't seen my wife to-night?

MARK. (*R. C.*) No.

(*Enter BENNETT L. door; crosses to R. C.*)

BEN. I've been to Sir John's house, sir—but—(*Sees HARDING*) I beg pardon, sir. (*Offers letter to HARDING*)

MARK. (*R. C.*) Oh, that's Strong's letter.

SIR J. (*Aside*) Not addressed. (*To BEN. who is going to door L.*) Stay! Who sent you with this?

BEN. (*At door L.*) Mr. Cross, sir, and— (*Catches MARK's eye and stops*)

SIR J. (*C.*) Yes—and who else?

BEN. (*L. C.*) I said Mr. Cross sent me, sir.

SIR J. (*C.*) But you said "and"—

MARK. (*At R. desk*) And Mr. Strong, of course. That will do, Bennett.

(*Exit BENNETT L. door*)

(*SIR J. after a slight pause, crosses L., opens letter and reads*)

MARK (*Aside to MRS. C. by fireplace*) You must get rid of him at once.

MRS. C. You must tell me why.

MARK. His wife is here. (*Goes up and then goes down R.*)

MRS. C. (*Mrs. C. is startled*) Sir John, will you come with me? (*Crossing L.*) You can easily read your letter in my carriage. Will you come? (*At door L.*)

SIR J. (*Quietly*) One moment. (*Crosses to table R. C., picks up fan, sees monogram—bus.—To MARK*) My wife has not been here?

MARK. No. (*R. of table R. C. pretending to read letters*)

SIR J. (*R. C.*) Then why is her fan here? (*Pause*) Why was this letter sent unaddressed? (*Pause*) Why did your servant stop and look at you when about to mention somebody who was with you sent the letter? (*Pause*) Why did you prompt your mother to hurry my departure? Why do you stand without answering me? Damn it, man, speak!

MARK. Harding, I have already assured you——

SIR J. (*C.*) You have assured me a lie.

MARK. (*R.*) Harding!

SIR J. (*C.*) A lie! I read it in your face—a lie. Explain this. (*Holds up fan*) My wife's fan—impossible to mistake—here is her monogram. You *can't* explain. (*Mrs. C. crosses*) No other lie is ready. Give me the truth then! For God's sake, man, give me the truth!

MARK. Harding, you are needlessly excited. When you are cooler, you will see that you have been both foolish and unjust. Now be sensible and go.

SIR J. (*Facing him R. C.*) I will not go. (*Puts fan down and moves L.*) My wife has not been to Mrs. Stanmore's, and I find her fan in your rooms. She must have been here—she may be here still. As you have lied to me once, I have a right to assure myself, and I will! (*Moves to L. C.*)

(MUSIC)

MARK. (*R. C.*) This is a liberty which I will not permit. (*They meet c.*)

(Enter LADY HARDING c.)

LADY H. John! (*MARK and SIR J. fall back*)

SIR J. Helen! My God! (*Pause—sits L.*)

LADY H. John, I can explain. Take me home, (*Coming down c.*)

SIR J. Alone—with another man—hiding from me!
(Repeating) Hiding from me!

LADY H. *(Coming down L. C.)* I came—to get—the letter.

SIR J. *(Rising)* And to remain here—to remain. Was it necessary to come alone? Was it necessary to conceal your movements from me—to lie to me? Was it necessary to remain here alone with a man—hidden away in the rooms of a man whose name has been coupled with yours before?

LADY H. John! I am innocent and have saved you.

SIR J. *(Tears up letter)* The price—the price! You save my life and kill my heart!

LADY H. *(c.)* John—you will believe me?

SIR J. *(Turning on her)* Never! Never—

MARK. *(B.)* Harding, I will tell you the whole truth.

SIR J. You! You have had time to invent another lie! *(Furiously)* Another word, and I—*(Crossing B.)*

(Lady H. stands between them)

Then we will meet again—once more. *(Crossing to table R. C.)*

MARK. As you please. *(Goes up)*

(John takes hat and is about to go)

LADY H. *(Opposing John R. C.)* John—stay! You know that I am innocent—that you are wronging me cruelly—that I love you with all my life and soul!

SIR J. Don't touch me. It is all over. You are false and hateful to me. Let me go. I will not have you touch me. You are shameful and shameless, you—*(Going C.)*

LADY H. *(On his R. arms round his neck)* Hush! for God's sake. You don't know what you are saying. *(She clings to him)* You shall not go till you have heard me. *(He struggles to disengage himself)* You must know my truth to you—you must know my love—see it in my eyes—hear it in my voice.

SIR J. *(Disengaging himself)* I don't want such love—stay where it is more welcome!

(Throws her off and exits violently L. door)

LADY H. John! John! *(Falls to the ground)*

THE IDLER.

MRS. CROSS (*Goes to her*)

HELEN

MARK

CURTAIN.

PICTURE.

MRS. CROSS LADY H.

MARK

ACT IV.

SCENE:—*Same as Act III. The following day.*

(BENNETT discovered)

BEN. I've a feeling I made an idiot of myself over that letter last night—too ready with my tongue—that's what it is. A servant as has the truth always on the tip of his tongue ain't no use. He should always have a lie ready behind his teeth—one behind each tooth for that matter. (*Knock*) Who's that? (*Goes to door L.*)

(Enter GENERAL MERRYWEATHER and KATE L.)

GEN. (L. C.) Is Mr. Cross at home?

BEN. Yes, sir. I'll tell him you are here.

(Exit BENNETT R. door)

KATE. (*Up c. critically looking round*) And so these are bachelor's rooms! This looks like anyone else's.

GEN. (c. putting hat and stick on couch) My dear, will you oblige me by sitting down and remaining quiet. Perhaps you will tell me why you insisted on following me here. (*Sitting on couch*)

KATE. (*Sitting—R. C. chair*) You may be sure, Papa, that I would not follow you if I had anyone else to follow.

GEN. Oh, I am aware of that, my darling child—and can only regret that you have hitherto—failed to attract.

KATE. (R. C.) You are quite wrong, papa, I do attract.

GEN. Oh, you do!

KATE. (R. C.) I'm a perfect lodestone, a magnet.

GEN. Really now!

KATE. I've lots of chances—but I've failed to be attracted. Of all the men I've met this season, I've only found one worth talking with.

GEN. Oh, you have found one!

KATE. Yes.

GEN. Come, that's promising.

KATE. And I like him very much.

GEN. And he—?

KATE. He's a man of taste, papa.

GEN. Excellent!

KATE. But there's one thing in the way!

GEN. (Aside) Ah, there would be.—What is that?

KATE. You see, I couldn't think of leaving you, dear.

GEN. Nonsense! I'm old enough to take care of myself.

KATE. (Rises and goes to him) You're quite sure you're not too old to take care of yourself, papa?

GEN. (Rising) Kate—this interview must now close.

KATE. But your future is on my mind. (R. C.)

GEN. It need have no particular interest for you. (Crossing R., carrying hat and stick and putting them on table R. C.)

KATE. But I know why you've come to see Mr. Cross.

GEN. Oh!

KATE. That's why I've come!

GEN. Then I regret your curiosity should be equalled by your intrusiveness. I will take another opportunity of seeing Mr. Cross. (Prepares to go)

(Enter MARK R. door, followed by BENNETT)

(Exit BENNETT L. door)

MARK. How do you do, General? (Crosses c.) How do you do, Miss Merryweather? (Shakes hands c.)

GEN. (R. C.) Ah, Mark! I wanted to talk to you—er—a matter of business.

KATE. (Aside) Fancy calling it business! (L. C.)

MARK. (R.) I'm quite at your disposal.

GEN. (R. C.) But as Kate insisted on accompanying me I'm afraid I must postpone the conversation—which will be of a strictly confidential nature. The dear child is so fond of me that she rarely leaves me.

KATE. You see Papa is a great anxiety to me, Mr.

Cross. But I'll go on the balcony for a little, if I'm in the way. (*Going up L. C.*)

(*Exit KATE c. window*)

GEN. (*Going L.*) Mark, I want to ask you a question—hum—ha! (*Seated on sofa L.*) You've never thought of marriage, Mark?

MARK. (*Seated R. C.*) Eh? Marriage—oh yes—often. It's a very agreeable thing—to think about.

GEN. (*On sofa*) Ah! it's a grand institution—no family should be without it.

MARK. No; I suppose not.

GEN. I mean of course—er—that every man should have a wife. It's at once a duty and a joy. Don't neglect your duty, my boy. As for me, I—er—have endeavored in that respect not to neglect mine.

MARK. Ah, to be sure. You have been married twice.

GEN. And I propose marrying again.

MARK. Good—I congratulate you.

GEN. Many thanks—but you can do more than that.

MARK. Indeed!

GEN. You can assist me.

MARK. I should be happy to know how.

GEN. The fact is, Mark, my dear boy—I—er—have had the honour of asking your mother to be my wife.

MARK. You astonish me!

GEN. And your mother has referred me to you!

MARK. Why did she refer you to me?

GEN. Because she says that as it is customary for children to ask the consent of their parents, so parents should ask the consent of their children.

MARK. Dear mother!

GEN. Thanks—perhaps you would like time for consideration.

MARK. (*Rising*) What is pleasing to my mother is pleasing to me.

(*KATE enters from balcony*)

KATE. Have you finished, papa?

GEN. Certainly not—confound that child!

KATE. This balcony is covered with smuts and my nose is such a magnet for smuts.

GEN. Well, do let me have two words more with Mark.

MARK. With pleasure—come into my room.

(*Exeunt MARK and MERRYWEATHER into another room R. door*)

KATE. (*Coming down slowly in front of desk and goes over to fireplace*) Dear papa has been very slow in coming to the point. (R.) (*She wipes the smuts off her nose before a mirror*)

(*Enter SIMEON STRONG L. door*)

Oh, here is my dear American! (*Going to him at table L. c.*) How do you do?

(*SIMEON bows*)

STRONG. (c. *putting hat on table L. c.*) I came in to see my friend, Mark Cross.

KATE. And you're disappointed.

STRONG. (c.) Yes, Miss Merryweather, agreeably disappointed. (*Pause*)

KATE (R.) I'm glad you're pleased.

STRONG. (c.) I'm afraid the pleasure is not mutual.

KATE. Oh, yes it is. Papa and Mr. Cross are talking business in the next room. I was very dull until you came in. (*Going up to fireplace—long pause*) Of course it's much livelier now.

STRONG. (c.) You are sarcastic, Miss Merryweather. Well, I'll allow I'm a man of few words.

KATE. So it seems.

STRONG. But not always—only with you.

KATE. You are very complimentary, Mr. Strong.

STRONG. You misunderstand me. When I have the pleasure of being with you I say mighty little for two reasons.

KATE. What are they?

STRONG. (R. C.) Well, the first is that the less I say the more time I'll have to listen to you, which gives me most pleasure.

KATE. (*Aside*) That's better.

STRONG. (R. C.) And the second is that you inspire me with a feeling I've never experienced before.

KATE. (*Aside—pleased*) Oh!

STRONG. (c.) That of nervousness.

KATE. (*Aside—disappointed*) Oh!

STRONG. I'll not deny that I think a lot of nice things—but I'm afraid to speak them lest they shouldn't pan out well.

KATE. I thought all nice things "panned out well."

STRONG. Not always, Miss Merryweather. (c. *pause*)

KATE. (*Aside*) Dear, dear, how stupid he seems!
(*Goes down R. bus.*)

STRONG. Miss Merryweather—I—I ventured to make a remark just now.

KATE. (*Seated on chair*) I remember your doing so—some little time since.

STRONG. I allowed that I was a man of few words.

KATE. I don't think I disputed it, Mr. Strong.

STRONG. And it occurred to me to give you an example of that personal characteristic. (*Beside her*)

KATE. Haven't you already done so?

STRONG. Ye—es—perhaps so; that's nervousness. But I'll give you another example, which maybe you'll call boldness. Have I your permission?

KATE. Yes, I'm quite curious.

STRONG. Miss Merryweather, will you marry me?

KATE. Oh! (*Rising and going down stage*)

STRONG. Well—Kate—

KATE. Oh, Mr. Strong, you've made me a proposal.
(*Crossing c.*)

STRONG. Does it displease you, Kate? (*Following her*)

KATE. No—but it is so strange.

STRONG. (R. C.) Strange! (*Disappointedly*)

KATE. Yes—because—because it is just what I wanted you to do.

STRONG. (*Delightedly*) Really! (*Coming towards her*)

KATE. Yes—because of papa. (*Going down L. e.*)

STRONG. Oh!

KATE. (*Going up c.*) It will be such a surprise—such a shock to him. (*Coming down*) Oh, what fun!

STRONG. (*Gravely*) Oh—it will be fun then?

KATE. Of course—don't you think so?

STRONG. I'm not clear about it—depends upon whether the fun will be on my side or not.

KATE. Oh, you'll have to laugh.

STRONG. At myself!

KATE. No—at papa, of course. He's trying to get married himself and doesn't dream that perhaps I'll get married.

STRONG. And will you?

KATE. Well, haven't you asked me?

STRONG. Yes—but you haven't answered me.

KATE. Oh, haven't I? What ought I to say?

STRONG. (*Taking her hands—they sit on sofa*) Well, never having had any experience in these things, I can't lay down the law, but if you were to say "Yes,

Simeon," and let me kiss you, I'd reckon it a good start.

KATE. (*Bus. of taking off hat, etc.*) Yes, Simeon.
(*They kiss*)

GEN. (*Outside R.*) Good-bye then—good-bye and thanks. You're a splendid fellow.

STRONG. Oh! (*They both rise—He is about to unclasp KATE*)

KATE. (*Holding him*) No, don't move—(*They both sit down again*) let Papa see us like this. Please kiss me again.

STRONG. For Papa's sake?

KATE. And—and your own.

(Enter MERRYWEATHER from R. door. Bus.)

(STRONG and KATE embrace)

GEN. Come, Kate—what! Good gracious!

KATE. In a minute, Papa.

GEN. (*Looking up C. and to R.*) Kate! What!
Great Heavens!

KATE. (*Not moving*) I'll be with you in a minute.

GEN. Release that child, sir!

KATE. No, don't move!

STRONG. I won't!

KATE. Please kiss me again. (STRONG does so)
Thank you.

GEN. What the devil do you mean by this infamous conduct?

STRONG. Sir, I have both an excuse and a justification.

GEN. Oh, you have, have you? I'll be glad to know them.

STRONG. Your daughter's irresistible charm for the one, and her approval for the other. (*Rising*)

KATE. (*Rising and crossing to GENERAL C.*) Irresistible charm, papa—think of that! Oh, how blind you have been! (*Putting on hat*)

GEN. Did I understand this gentleman that you approved of the er—undignified position in which I found you?

KATE. Certainly. (*Taking STRONG'S right arm*) We're engaged!

GEN. Indeed!

STRONG. (L. C.) I propose doing myself the honour of calling on you, General, without delay.

GEN. Humph! Without delay! You certainly appear to be a man of alacrity.

KATE. I told Simeon you would be surprised, papa.
GEN. (*Taking hat from table L. C.*) Mr. Strong—
good morning. (*Crosses L.*)
STRONG. (c.) General, good morning.
KATE. (*Aside to STRONG*) Good-bye, Simeon.
GEN. Kate, your arm.

(*KATE leaves STRONG and crosses to GENERAL*)

STRONG. Till to-morrow—Kate!

(*GENERAL near door L.*)

KATE. Till to-morrow—Simeon. (*Going with GENERAL*) We've both had a busy morning, haven't we, Papa dear!

(*Exeunt GENERAL and KATE L. door*)

STRONG. (*Looking after them*) This makes my hair curl. Ah! a balcony! (*Going up*) I can see her again before to-morrow, after all.

(*Exit to balcony c.*)

(*Enter HARDING, shown in by BENNETT L.*)

HARD. Tell Mr. Cross I wish to see him here alone.
BEN. He is here, sir. (*Crossing to door R. and speaking off*) Sir John Harding, sir. (*Then re-crossing to HARDING C.*) Mr. Cross will see you, sir.

(*Enter MARK R. door*)

(*Exit BENNETT L. door*)

HARD. You know why I have come?

MARK. Yes, I am ready to arrange a meeting.

HARD. (c.) We are met—here.

MARK. (R. of desk) Here! I should have said somewhere abroad. You forget that one may survive.

HARD. (R. C.) We take the same risk. We fight here—or I kill you here.

MARK. As you please. I was not thinking of myself.

HARD. Here are two revolvers, both fully loaded. (*Places them on table—pushing them to him*) Take one.

(MARK takes one carelessly)

Does your clock strike? (*Going down in front of L. table*)

MARK. Yes—

HARD. Good! It wants five minutes to 12. You remain there—I here. On the third stroke of twelve we fire. (L.)

MARK. Harding, there is just one thing I have to say to you.

HARD. There is nothing to be said.

MARK. (*Standing by desk R.*) Don't misunderstand me. I have nothing to say that will affect our present position. I have wronged, insulted, outraged you in thought and intention—but your wife is innocent.

HARD. I have no wife.

MARK. You have the noblest, truest wife on earth. Have you listened to her since yesterday.

HARD. I have not seen her. For me she has ceased to exist.

MARK. (*Reflects a moment—then takes out his pocket-book and writes*) Harding, note this. In a few minutes you will kill me. Of that I am convinced. It will not be unjust. But after that, what then? (*Pause*) I know—I read it in your face. You will kill yourself.

HARD. Cease!

MARK. (*Rising*) But there is one who will die—whom your death will kill, an injured, innocent woman—the woman who loves you—your wife. That need not be. One death is enough. Here in my pocket-book I have written and declared that, feeling myself to be worthless, I am about to take my own life. This will ensure your safety. Now will you listen to the truth. (*Puts pocket-book on table*)

HARD. There is no truth left. (*MARK is going to speak*) If you persist I shall insult you before killing you. I shall call you cur—

MARK. (*Interrupting*) Then by God, you shall know no truth. For you are as worthless as I am. (*At corner of desk*)

(Enter STRONG from balcony—unperceived)

HARD. (*Looking at clock*) It is time. You understand, on the third stroke we fire.

(Clock strikes once)

STRONG. (*Aside*) Good God! (*Clock strikes again*)

(*MARK and HARDING take position. Clock strikes third time. STRONG comes down and stands between them. They fall back. Pause*)

(c.) Gentlemen, I appear to be in the way.

HARD. (l. c.) Doubtless by the arrangement of your friend Mr. Cross.

STRONG. Sir, you are—you are mistaken. Mr. Cross was absolutely unaware of my presence in the house.

HARD. Mr. Strong, you are not concerned in this affair.

MARK. Go, Simeon!

STRONG. One moment. As this is really a serious matter, I may be of some assistance. I am not without experience. Now you appear to be conducting this affair most irregularly.

HARD. Your interference is unwarrantable. Stand aside!

STRONG. You have no seconds—and so don't know whether this affair might not be arranged in a less extreme way. There are such things as explanation, apology and forgiveness. I learned that yesterday, Harding.

HARD. You remain where you are at your peril.

STRONG. I remain. (*Back to MARK*) Is that the pistol you killed my brother with?

HARD. (*Slightly staggers—recovering himself*) Once more—stand aside!

(*MARK b. c. urging STRONG away*)

STRONG. I will not. (*Remains between the two*)

(*Enter LADY HARDING and MRS. CROSS l. door*)

HARD. Then by God—I fire! (l. c.)

LADY H. (*Coming quickly to c.*)

(*SIMEON after taking revolver from MARK retires up c. HARDING upon seeing his wife throws his revolver on to sofa*)

John! (*Pause*) Why do you fight for your lives? Because one has injured the other? You have both injured me. This is very noble and courageous. Honour must be satisfied and the woman whose life you have

wrecked and whose heart you have broken must be forgotten. You—(To MARK) laid a snare for me; took advantage of my husband's danger to seek the gratification of a selfish passion—you killed my happiness—you would now kill my husband. You—(To HARDING) insulted me, spurned me, threw me from you as a worthless thing. You were in danger—I saved you. This is my reward. All the light is taken out of my life. I am neglected, forsaken, forgotten—my name is to be a bye-word—my life to be lived out in shame. Anything—(Addressing both) that your honour be satisfied. What of my honour? (Pause c.)

HARD. (L.) God knows the shame is as much mine as yours.

LADY H. (c. pointing to CROSS, with emotion) You shall hear the truth. Mr. Cross will you tell my husband—or must I? (Pause—goes R.)

MARK. (Crossing to c., passing his hand over his brow) No, I will speak. (MUSIC) Harding, I plotted to save you at the price of your honour—I schemed to rob you of your wife. Before her marriage I was blind enough to think she cared for me—after her marriage I was mad and guilty enough to let a wild passion for her, and hatred of you, grow in me. It was at my suggestion that your wife came alone and unknown to you to receive from me Strong's letter. I intended that she should remain. I had not understood the greatness of her love for her husband—of her devotion, of her invincible purity. She was leaving the room when you came in. There is no more to say. There are injuries for which no atonement can be offered, no forgiveness can be asked—no words can express sorrow. This is one. (Pause. Goes up slowly and leans against fireplace with back to the audience, leaving SIR JOHN and LADY HARDING C., and STRONG and MRS. C. slightly up)

LADY H. John—you have heard the truth. I can add nothing to it. Perhaps for acting as I did you cannot yet forgive me, although it was done for you. (Pause—he is motionless with head bent) (Crossing c.) You are silent—it is so. It is hard to bear, for I love you so well. But I will wait. Until you can wholly forgive me and take me to your arms again we will not meet. Yet I know that sometime, remembering all the days and joys that were, you will come to me. I will wait, and wait, while my heart keeps from breaking (c., pause)

HARD. (Crossing up to her—struggling with emotion) Helen, last night you asked me to take you home,

I was mad and spurned you. Will you spurn me now when I ask you to take me home? (*Holds out his hands pleadingly*)

LADY H. (*Coming to him*) Thank God! (*She takes his hands. They move towards door L.*)

(*LADY H. pauses for a moment and looks at MARK—to MRS. CROSS, who is standing by her*)

Tell him that I forgive him, and that my husband will try to forget.

(*Exeunt SIR J. and LADY H., L. door slowly*)

STRONG. (*Pause—coming down stage to MARK—laying his hand on his shoulder*) Mark, you are a good boy, but loafing's the devil! Now, my expedition—

MARK. (*Who is seated R. c.*) Shall be led by me. Go, Simeon, with my mother.

(*STRONG crosses to table L. c., takes hat and cane. Then after bus. with MRS. C. goes to door L. and exits*)

MRS. C. (*Crosses to MARK, who has taken up pistol*)

MARK. Mother!

MRS. C. Mark, may I trust you? (*They look into each other's face*)

MARK. For your sake, mother, yes. (*They grasp hands and kiss*)

(*Exit MRS. C.*)

MARK. Where to go! How to forget! Ah! yes! Simeon was right. (*Puts pistol into box while his face lights up a little—rings bell*) Yes—that is the best.

(*Enter BENNETT L. door*)

BEN. You rang, sir?

MARK. (*Writing at table*) Bennett, you may pack up.

BEN. Shall I pack for a long journey?

MARK. Yes.

BEN. (*Nervously*) May I ask where, sir?

MARK. Our journey lies towards the north! (*Continues writing*)

CURTAIN.

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